

A Conversation with Joe Henry
by Frank Goodman (Puremusic.com, 2/2004)

We feel very fortunate to present a lengthy, friendly, and technically intimate conversation with one of the most interesting and talented songwriters working today, Joe Henry.

We got turned on to him in our interview some time ago with Steve Earle, who sang Joe's praises as one of his favorites. So we wasted little time in acquiring a cross section of his work. We quickly got the picture that Joe began more in the singer songwriter, alt-country vein and made the almost unprecedented journey toward a more jazz inspired groove music with lyrics that were following a sympathetic trajectory. It was progressively less linear, more atmospheric, and the cast of characters changed accordingly, including musicians as diverse as the Jayhawks and Ornette Coleman. Alas, my description falls short, but what follows is much more complete.

What's fascinating to this writer is the unique evolution of this artist, and how it continues to unfold. I asked Joe about it, and he was kind enough to walk me through the whole discography. That's not something I would normally consider that interesting. But when an artist continually mutates over time (unlike, say, Neil Young, who seems more of a zig zagger), we think the method to his madness is worthy of explanation.

Some peripheral circumstances create notoriety spikes in the artist's profile: being married to Madonna's sister Melanie, appearing recently in an episode of *Dharma and Greg*, and producing the Grammy winning comeback for 60s soul icon Solomon Burke. You see what I mean, he's an enigmatic and fascinating fellow.

Tiny Voices (on Anti Records, see our review last month) is the fabulous new Joe Henry album, and you will find clips from that and the previous and wonderful *Scar* on the listen page. His website has a preview of a short film about the record by Steven Lippman, check that out. And now, a telephone call with the artist.

Puremusic: You're one of our very favorite artists here at the webzine, and so we're tickled that you made time for us.

Joe Henry: Well, that's very kind of you, thank you.

PM: I'll start out by saying that I thought *Tiny Voices* was a great, great recording. It's a wonderful piece.

JH: Thanks.

PM: I was a huge *Scar* fan. In fact, it's one of the records that I have trouble getting off the player. And this new album is really quite a bit different—even though it comes from a similar sonic world, I think the intention was really different.

JH: It was. And thanks for noticing, because—I mean, people don't. Other people just hear a horn and go, "Oh, more of that."

PM: I really get tired of people calling you the jazz inflected songwriter.

JH: Yeah. I think the only people who think in those terms are people who don't like jazz. They hear a horn and they say, "Oh, it's really jazzy."

PM: And as a jazzy songwriter myself, I'm really disappointed by the fear of jazz in the singer songwriter world.

JH: [laughs] Well, it's just another influence. I think that anybody who grows up in roughly the same time period that we have, we've had so much music around us. We've had access to so much. When the CD boom happened, so much stuff that'd been out of print became available again.

PM: Right.

JH: I don't know why people think of Jazz as such a different kind of influence and even fear it as an idea. As opposed to if you listen to jazz and you're a singer songwriter that you're just going to turn into Sting. It's funny how there are certain kind of structures and colors that people can hear over and over again, but if you reference a particular thing, a flag goes up. For instance, people say, "Well, you're not going to have a bass clarinet on *every* song, are you?"

PM: [laughs]

JH: No one ever said to me, "You're not going to put a *guitar* on *all* this stuff, are you?" To me, it's just all racket. Every musical instrument is a noisemaker, with varying degrees of texture and sustain. But a lot of people have a real funny response to Jazz as a whole, just the idea of it, of what that represents. They figure you've strayed to what they perceive as that territory and a warning bell goes off for them.

PM: And when you say that all those instruments, anything at all is just a racket, that it's just a noisemaker—to me, that applies whether someone is in front of a microphone playing or you pull it in from a sampler or you pull it in from anywhere else.

JH: I completely agree with you. I had some friends, some peers many years ago when sampling first became available as a tool. And there were people who decidedly thought of themselves as purists, and talked about, "Oh, I just recorded with real musicians live," as if that was some badge of courage.

PM: [laughs]

JH: When Alan Lomax put a microphone in front of Leadbelly, he was sampling Leadbelly.

PM: [laughs]

JH: That's not Leadbelly, that's an electronic representation that reminds you of Leadbelly.

PM: Right.

JH: But people become so funny at the degree of separation between what you're putting a mic in front of.

PM: As if that sample didn't begin with somebody sitting in front of a microphone blowing or plucking something.

JH: Somewhere, yeah. That's absolutely true.

PM: So I caught on to your work kind of belatedly in the last two, three years and went

back and bought everything I could get my hands on. I first heard about you in an interview with Steve Earle.

JH: Oh, interesting.

PM: He said, “Oh yeah, Frank, one of my favorite songwriters is Joe Henry.” And I had to just plead ignorance. So I wondered, are you and Steve buddies? Have you bumped heads somewhere?

JH: I’ve never met him face-to-face. I’ve had one phone conversation with him. We’ve got some friends in common, but I—we’ve kind of crossed paths and missed connecting a few times. Once when I played in New York, I talked to him on the phone. He said, “Yeah. You were in New York a couple months ago, and I couldn’t get into the show. It was sold out.” And I’m going, “Come on, Steve, you couldn’t talk yourself into the door?”

PM: [laughs] A guy like him...

JH: “I don’t believe you.” So we had a really nice chat. I got in touch with him when I was doing the Solomon Burke record, casting a wide net looking for interesting songwriters that I thought might write something for that project.

PM: Did he take a swing at that?

JH: He didn’t. He wanted to. He said he was going to give it a shot. But he’s an incredibly busy fellow.

PM: Yeah.

JH: At that moment he had a number of things going on. And he said, “I’ll try to see if I could find something that I got going in my work.”

PM: Who knew it was going to win a Grammy, right?

JH: Yeah, right. But Steve didn’t get anything to me in time. But it was good for me to just kind of ring his bell, because I’ve certainly appreciated his work for a long time. I’m still waiting to actually meet him face-to-face at some point.

PM: Yeah, he’s a terrific guy. And it’s nice to have somebody as discriminating as him saying good about you out there.

JH: Well, of course it’s very flattering. And he’s somebody I have so much respect for, for a number of reasons. Just for starters, I have such high regard for anybody who’s been where he has and come back from it and is continuing to do really great work. It’s such a relief when somebody talented gets out there on the wire and actually brings themselves back. We all have too many stories about the people who didn’t come back from that. And I’m so grateful that he has, because we need those stories.

PM: Yeah. And he’s not one of those guys who had a casual brush with the devil, either.

JH: No. It wasn’t a casual brush, I don’t think, at all.

PM: No, he was seated at the table with him, to be sure.

So this might be just a tiny bit tricky, because I’m very interested in your evolution as a

writer. I mean, very few have really taken that turn from the realm of so-called alternative country—a bad name, really—

JH: Yeah.

PM: —to the jazzier tonality and mentality. Is there any way you could shed any light on how you made that turn over time, or what was going on that induced you?

JH: Well, I can try. For starters, you have to understand that when I was doing what they now call quote, unquote *alt-country* music, there was no such thing. I mean, that didn't exist as a category.

PM: Right.

JH: I'm fond of saying they didn't call it anything except unpopular.

PM: [laughs]

JH: So it really wasn't like a club. It wasn't really a stand. When I started working in that vernacular, I never had it in my mind that that's where I was supposed to stay. It just made sense at the moment. I certainly grew up listening to a lot of country music.

I was born in the South, and my parents are country music listeners. My parents aren't people of leisure. They didn't play records a lot when I was young. That wasn't happening around me. But if I heard music, that's what I heard. So I certainly had that in my foundation, as part of my subliminal education. And what happened is that I made a couple records that I didn't really think were my own. The first record I ever released was on Profile Records in New York, which was a hip-hop label.

PM: Wow.

JH: They had Run-DMC, they were making a lot of money, and they were thinking about branching out to become a much broader record label. They signed a couple of really odd things that they didn't know what to do with. But as a result, it was the first record of mine that came out—essentially demos pressed to vinyl. It wasn't really a shot at making a realized record.

From there, I got signed to A & M and made a record with Anton Fier that, again, was not anywhere near the kind of record I wanted to make. They had much more invested in their relationship with him than with me. And when it came down to it, I realized that I was the lowest man on the totem pole. And so Anton was kind of making another—almost like another Golden Palominos project and just using my voice and my songs, but not really taking into consideration where I wanted it to go musically.

Then, when I got to make the third record, and I'd gotten the lay of the land a bit, I said, "Hold on. I can't afford to let another record get out of my grasp."

PM: Right.

JH: And so I started working in a much faster, much more stripped down way. It was mostly acoustic, because I felt that was the best way to get people in a room where we could hear each other. We were going to record pretty live and pretty fast, so that when I went home at night, no one was going to be tinkering behind my back.

PM: Right.

JH: And I made a record called *Shuffletown* with T-Bone Burnett. I've known him for a really long time, and that was the beginning of my association with him. And it was also the beginning of me putting an idea together that I didn't really realize at the time was going to become a template for me.

But I worked with some more folkie musicians like David Mansfield, who's a violinist and guitarist, and also Don Cherry, who's the trumpet player from Ornette Coleman's original band.

PM: Wow. How did he end up on that same record as David Mansfield?

JH: I just called him. He was available at the time. Don was only in town a brief moment when I was. I saw a moment of daylight, and I had this concept of putting a particular kind of band together.

PM: Wow.

JH: So I got in touch with Don, because I loved his playing.

PM: Sure.

JH: And I also knew enough about him to know that he wasn't restricting in his thoughts—as opposed to, like, “I'm a jazz artist, and this isn't jazz.” He just liked songs, period. And I worked with the great jazz bassist named Cecil McBee. I'd see him play in New York. I was living in New York at the time. And my original idea was to get Charlie Rich to be the piano player.

PM: Oh, man...

JH: Thinking Don Cherry and Charlie Rich, it made perfect sense to me. They're both soulful in a really unique way. I couldn't interest Charlie in doing it, though I pursued it pretty diligently.

PM: Wow. Did you talk with him personally or just manager to manager?

JH: No. As far as I got was flying to Nashville and talking to Barry Beckett who had known him for a long time and worked with him on records in the 60s.

PM: A real character all his own.

JH: Oh, yeah, absolutely. And I was down there meeting a publisher. And they introduced me to Barry, whom I'd gone to hoping to get him to intercede on my behalf. And he basically said, “Look, Charlie doesn't really leave the house. He sits at home, and he's got his chicken franchise.” He owned some stock in Church's Chicken.

PM: Really?

JH: “He just drinks and watches his chicken stock go up and down.”

PM: [laughs]

JH: So I didn't get very far. And I didn't really know how else to get at him beyond that.

PM: Wow.

JH: But I made a record that was folkie in its nature because it was small and acoustic and the songs had a very folkie structure, which is what I do. And that promptly got me dropped from A & M.

PM: Right. That's not what they were looking for.

JH: I mean, the day the record came out, they told me that I was released.

PM: Oh, my God!

JH: Kind of makes me angrier now than it did then, if I think about it. Because they could have easily just given me the record and said, "Go find a home for it."

PM: Yeah!

JH: But instead they just diffused it by sending it out—shipping it, and then refusing to do anything for it, and giving notice to the industry that they weren't in the Joe Henry business any longer.

PM: And in essence, burying it immediately.

JH: Exactly. So where that took me was, I had a manager at the time who was based in Minneapolis, and he worked at Twin/Tone Records. He was an A & R man there. He also managed, at the time, Soul Asylum and the Jayhawks. There was no record deal, but I was looking for a way to keep working and get out on the road and play. It turned out his band the Jayhawks were in a similar situation. They were waiting to be signed to American Records by George Drakoulis, but were in between their Twin/Tone deal and going on to bigger things.

PM: Right.

JH: And they were in a funny stalemate, waiting for that deal to come together. We were not being subsidized by anybody, so we were both kind of broke and looking for a way to tour. So we got thrown in together and became foxhole buddies, out on the road in a kind of primitive way.

And I realized that I so much enjoyed playing with them as a band, because I'd never worked with people who worked and played and thought as a unit; I'd always brought different musicians together. But to start working with a band that actually worked and thought as a band was really intriguing. And when we were out on the road trying to play the songs from *Shuffletown*, which were very intricate in a way, it didn't fall into their bag very easily. But I would listen to their set every night—they opened the show as themselves, and then were my backing band for the second half of the show—I heard how open and free their thing was, because their songs fit their vocabulary.

When we finished the tour, I said, "Thank you. I know that was pretty tough. But I'm going to go home now and I'm going to write a bunch of songs that we can play together, and we'll see what that's like." So I went home with no other intention in mind except to write to fit that scene—just like a screenwriter saying, "Okay, I'm making a western..."

PM: Right.

JH: “It’s got to be like this. Here’s how it has to work.” So I wrote a record that we could make together because I was curious to see if I could do it, and what would it be like to plug into their machine, if the songs could fit their musical voice.

JH: And that’s how I found myself in what became the alt-country world.

PM: So that Jayhawks-intended record—what was that called?

JH: It’s a record called *Short Man’s Room*. I went to Minneapolis months later, and over the course of a weekend, we did some live to 8-track tape demos, which just became that record. Because I liked the recordings well enough, I thought, “I don’t really want to go get a deal and then go redo this. I think it just is what it is.”

PM: Yeah, because you’d never beat the demos anyway.

JH: Yeah. It just had a good spirit to it, and it was a really fun project.

PM: So *Short Man’s Room* is an eight-track album.

JH: Yeah.

PM: Bitchin.

JH: I think I bought them a case of beer or something—

PM: [laughs]

JH: I didn’t pay them any money. We just spent these long nights—there’s an engineer and producer who used to work for Rykodisc in Minneapolis. He was an engineer at the same time, and he had a deal with them that evenings and weekends he could use their office space as a recording studio. So when we made *Short Man’s Room* we showed up at 7 o’clock on a Friday night and had to be out by 7 o’clock Monday morning.

PM: Unbelievable.

JH: So that’s basically what we did, put the drums in the conference room.

PM: [laughs]

JH: Gary Louris and Mark Olson and I were all sitting at three secretaries’ desks in a row. All sitting in front of their pictures of their families—

PM: Unreal...

JH: —and their paper clips, and kind of sitting in a row. And that’s what we did. That’s a long way of telling you how I found myself there.

PM: Right.

JH: And I signed to Mammoth Records based on them hearing it as a finished record. And that was a relationship that continued and mutated. They were owned by Atlantic at one point, then owned by Disney. But I operated under their banner until after *Scar*.

PM: So *Short Man's Room* was the first Mammoth record.

JH: Right. And at that point, I just continued to try to figure out how to expand my musical vocabulary and keep working. And I made one more record called *Kindness of the World*, where I used the bulk of the Jayhawks and some other players as well. But by the time I'd finished that record, even before it came out, I was exhausted and frustrated with the process, and felt like it didn't begin to articulate what I wanted to do.

I felt I'd really limited myself by—I had so little in the way of resources to make a record that—I only knew how to go into a room with a bunch of people live and go after takes, because that was the fastest way—the only way I'd ever known to work. But I finished that second record with the Hawks and came away kind of disgusted with myself because I had a much greater ambition for that record than I knew how to realize. I came home saying, “If I don't find another way to work, I'm done, because I won't make another record that way.”

PM: Wow.

JH: And then I'd worked on a few records as a production associate—assistant, whatever you want to call it—with my friend, T-Bone Burnett. And during the first record we made together in that configuration, we were working on a record with Bruce Cockburn. I had just moved to Los Angeles from New York at that point, and we worked on a record with Bruce. And through T-Bone, I very quickly made the acquaintance of people like Jim Keltner and Booker T.

PM: Wow.

JH: And Edgar Meyer, and some really interesting people I'm still really friendly with. I mean, Jim Keltner, who's remained a good friend. And it just opened my mind up to throwing myself into a bigger pond.

And I met the engineer Patrick McCarthy, who was a young man from Ireland who came to the States with U2, and is now producing his fourth R.E.M. record, I guess. He's been doing that for—since they jumped from Scott Litt. And Patrick and I were playing a lot of racquetball together.

PM: [laughs]

JH: And he has a completely different history than I did. He came up in Ireland recording with the London Philharmonic and U2, and then came to the States and worked with Robbie Robertson and Daniel Lanois. He just came from a whole different world—he'd never worked on records that really had a budget, or where a budget really meant anything.

PM: [laughs]

JH: He worked for people where there was always more time and more money if you decided you wanted to spend it.

PM: Wow.

JH: And he became a good pal. I talked a lot with him about my frustrations with the way I was working. And I decided to work with him on my next record and just learn a new way to work. I said, “I've got to start over and learn to operate in a different way.” So he and I made *Trampoline* together. And a lot of that was him setting me up with a small recording

unit in my garage so that I could work alone.

PM: What kind of a unit was that?

JH: Oh, just a D-88.

PM: Yeah.

JH: He loaned me a really good mic, like a Neumann U-67. So I had one signal chain, one mic pre and one compressor and then the tape. And I just moved this mic in front of everything.

PM: [laughs]

JH: I started running a drum machine through an amp and miked, and I'd make a loop for myself of something to write to, which got me into a different frame of mind.

PM: That was really brilliant on his part.

JH: Well, that was kind of an accident on my part, because he set me up so that I could come home and do vocals and just kind of work on my own time. But once I had a little setup at home, I became really liberated by the idea of what I could get away with just sitting and not being on somebody else's time.

PM: Yeah. "I have a bass, I've got a signal chain. I'm all set."

JH: Exactly. And I borrowed a drum machine from somebody, and didn't know how to program it, but started—it had, like, 500 presets. So I started setting up writing assignments for myself where I would just find some loops and say, "Well, I've never written in this shape before. What would that do to me?"

PM: Wow.

JH: And I also consciously started using fewer and fewer chord changes. Because I realized that with the singer songwriter mentality, where you're sitting and writing with a guitar and waiting for a song to come out, you find yourself building in every idea through the guitar. So there are too many passing chords, there's too much going on where you try to teach that to a band later, like you have to take everyone down this very narrow path and this very snaking path, where people can only follow what you're doing and do the same thing. It's not very open. So I started using fewer and fewer changes, and that really opened things up.

And I also realized that I always, as a writer, used too many words because I was articulating rhythmic ideas with syllables. If I wanted a song to have a real aggressive kind of tumbling groove to it, I used a lot of syllables to articulate that idea of rhythm.

PM: Wow, right.

JH: But once I'd put a specific rhythmic idea in place, once there was already a rhythmic integrity described, as a lyricist I was completely free to throw a few words out, maybe in a much more languid fashion, and then let the rhythm continue, and then meter it out in a really different way.

Once I got to that idea, realizing how I had gone astray as far as that was concerned, it was a

whole new world for me. And I just started allowing myself to think very differently. At the same time, I wasn't thinking *that* differently, letting myself follow the ideas that I've maybe always had.

On that record I worked with some really different types of musicians. I worked with Page Hamilton from the band Helmet. He was the rhythm guitar player.

PM: Wow. I don't have *Trampoline*, so I don't know some of this. This is great.

JH: That was just kind of the beginning for me.

PM: Page Hamilton.

JH: Yeah. I used a lot of samples. I played a lot of things on my own. I worked with a drummer named Carla Azar, who's one of my favorite drummers. She had toured with Wendy & Lisa and Mick Jagger and—she's just fantastic.

PM: Wendy & Lisa are so amazing.

JH: Yeah. They've become really good friends of mine quite recently, which is unusual, because I worked with a number of people who came out of their crowd.

PM: Wow. That was cool music they did for *Carnavale*.

JH: Beautiful.

PM: Yeah.

JH: Really, that's kind of what happened. I probably told you more than you really wanted to know.

PM: No, no, no. Not for a second. It's fascinating, great stuff.

So...what happened then?

JH: I made *Trampoline* with them. The next record after that was *Fuse*. And I was working a similar way, but where I was groping my way in the dark with *Trampoline*, I had a method in place when I started working on *Fuse*. My second child was an infant at that moment, and I was just working at home doing a lot alone, working on it when she was napping. I had to really find times when I could get away with working.

PM: Wow.

JH: And again, it was another kind of game of figuring stuff out from obstacles, what they do to you. But John Cage always did, and I'm a big fan of Cage. I didn't look at it as a limitation, I looked at it as that idea of one more color on my pallet. It's afternoon, and my daughter is asleep. I may have 45 minutes, I may have two and a half hours, who knows?

PM: [laughs]

JH: And I found that I wasn't getting any less work done. And I was sort of bringing people in, here and there, to replace things I had played on my own or augment it in some way.

PM: Right.

JH: And at that point I felt like the gloves were off. And whether I was sampling Dizzy Gillespie, which I did on that record, or bringing in another trumpet player, I was wide open to that as an idea, and wide open to everything as an influence. I mean, I tried really hard to—I find very few people that I’ve wanted to work with have told me no.

I really wanted Dr. Dre to produce *Fuse*, and I couldn’t get him interested. But I was determined that was a great idea.

PM: Well, it *was* a great idea. Was he just too busy or was it too weird?

JH: Well, I just don’t think he was interested in what he heard of mine, if he heard any of it.

PM: Right.

JH: But I had fairly direct access to him because I knew somebody at Interscope and I got him a packet that I know he received, but whether he ever paid any attention to it or not, who knows. But it was an idea that I was dedicated to.

And because I started making that record with that idea in mind, I started off making what I thought would be a Dr. Dre record, and found out I had no idea how to do that. So what it became had nothing to do with that.

PM: Right.

JH: But it was certainly set in motion by an idea of wanting to work like I saw him working.

PM: Amazing.

JH: I got through that process, and I felt pretty satisfied about what I was learning. But also, as time went on, I became a much more sophisticated listener. I’d always been a jazz lover, but then I started listening to jazz—I don’t want to say exclusively, but as far as entertainment, if I was turning to music, I wanted to listen to something that had nothing to do with what I did. I didn’t want to hear other singer songwriters. I didn’t want to be bothered by inadvertent comparisons, the way my mind races and—comparing myself to what other people are doing who seem to be in my camp. So I would put music on that was beyond me.

And that let me to go back to being a *listener*. I listened to Mingus and Ellington and I’d think, “Well, these guys are so beyond me that I can’t even compare what I do to what they do. So there. I’m free just to be a listener again.”

Or I’d listen to Edith Piaf, or something that I love, but I saw it completely from a different orbit. And I’m sure that that’s what led me to say, “Well, I love how that instrument works, or that kind of progression works. I don’t have to go back to a guitar there because I’m a quote, unquote, singer songwriter from the rock era.”

PM: Right.

JH: “This stuff still exists and it’s still alive, and I’m allowed to access that.” You’re kind of told in none-to-subtle ways that you’re not really allowed to go there because it’s not yours.

PM: Yeah, right. “You can’t play that, per se, and so you can’t use that.” Bullshit.

JH: Yeah. I mean, I’d think, “I could hire a sax player the same way I hire another guitar player.”

PM: Exactly.

JH: But I went back to what John Cage said when he was first studying Zen, and he worried whether it was his to study. And then once he got deeper into it he realized that was completely a foolish idea. Of course it was his! If he wanted to take it on, it was his. And I thought that way about jazz as an idea. I certainly wouldn’t allow myself to be told that those tonalities weren’t available to me. I decided that was ludicrous; I wouldn’t limit myself that way. And if I wanted to hear things expanding and just going in a different direction—if the song took me there, then it was legitimate for me to go there.

PM: Absolutely.

JH: So, Frank, there’s my overview, I guess.

PM: Wow! That’s more than I hoped for, and it’s just fantastic to hear it roll out so eloquently.

But then there was another quantum leap from *Fuse* to *Scar*.

JH: Yeah, I think so too. And that’s funny, because when I finished *Fuse*, I was on tour, and I’m thinking about what next, and I really thought I was going to make like a Black Eyed Peas record. I still had this idea of doing something that was much more in tone like a hip-hop record—a lot of samples, a lot more aggressive, a lot more stripped down, a lot more fragmented. I love how samples can feel, by their nature, really fragmented.

PM: Right.

JH: Or like on an old Sly Stone record, things just kind of pop up for a minute and then they’re gone, they don’t ever come back.

PM: Right. [laughs]

JH: I love when a sample happens, it’s an event. It’s almost like a sound effect, and I’m really intrigued by that. So that’s what I thought I was going to do.

And then I found myself starting to write songs that began setting themselves apart on a pile. You write songs—when I make a record it’s not just the tune I’ve just written, it’s as I’m writing, the songs, together, start to identify themselves as a body that feels like a novel would start to take shape, I might imagine. So I set other things aside and start focusing on what that is trying to become.

And I realized the songs that were materializing on this particular pile didn’t have anything to do with the kind of record I thought I was setting out to make, or the kind of record I was describing to people that I was going to make next.

My family and I had moved by then and I had a studio in a guest house—I still have a studio in a guest house, a so much better work situation. And from *Trampoline* on, I was describing my first primitive setup at home. I got very addicted to being able to work

whenever I wanted to work. And every time I've taken on a production project, a scoring project, or I've had a recording budget for a record, I've put a fair chunk of whatever I make into my home studio in order to be freer to work the way I wanted to work and when I wanted to work.

So I started doing these very elaborate demos that became the template for *Scar*, where I really wanted to work with some orchestration. I began demoing songs, using strings samples and the like to see if the songs would actually live in that environment, and whether or not that was really the place I could go with them.

PM: Right. So you were doing the string samples yourself.

JH: Yeah, I was just creating melodies and roughing things out, because I knew that if I was going to make the kind of record that I was now imagining, it was going to be, on my terms, a fairly expensive proposition. You're talking about hiring an arranger, and even with the smallest orchestra it's just going to get into some real money. I wanted to lay out a map for myself to know that it would work.

PM: Yeah, you're moving right out of five into six figures.

JH: Yeah. And also I hadn't recorded live with people in a room for a number of records at this point. I had abandoned that when I started working on *Trampoline*. But now I was intrigued by the possibility of getting a group of people in a room and tapping into the synergy of people playing together. That was probably because a lot of the jazz I'd been listening to returned me to that idea, after it had become rather a dead idea for me. But I knew that I had new skills and a more open mind, and I was going to go back into that and take the good out of it, but not be confined by the inherent limitation of working that way. I thought I was ready to jump back in and reap some of the benefit, where I'd mostly only suffered from the limitation in the past.

So I talked to my friend Craig Street, who's a producer that I'd been friendly with for years. We'd always vaguely talked about working together, though nothing had really come of it except that I sang a duet with Me'shell Ndegeocello on a record of hers that he had produced. But I knew that what I was about to get into was going to be big enough that I needed some help. I really needed an aggressive third ear. I needed somebody. To try to be a performer, and try to be a singer, and a bandleader, and a producer all at the same time...

PM: You can't do it all.

JH: Something gets dropped.

PM: Yeah.

JH: So I got together with Street and played him the demos I was doing, and he played me some stuff he'd been working on. And we found that there was a lot in common with the basic tonality of what we were both doing. And without a whole lot of forethought, I just threw the door open to us working on this record together—over the course of a single evening, him coming over for dinner one night and me playing him a bunch of stuff. And I spit-balled with him my ideal band, who I wanted to have in a room.

PM: Wow.

JH: There were people I had really wanted to work with, Brad Mehldau being one.

PM: Right.

JH: Brian Blade who I'd been friendly with for years but never worked with. He's so gifted as a musician.

PM: So amazing, yeah.

JH: Then there's another drummer named Abe Laboriel, Jr., Craig had worked with him a lot. And again, I was friendly with him because we have a lot of mutual friends.

PM: He's the legendary bass player's son, right?

JH: Yes, he is. And a great bass player himself, though because of his father, he would never say that.

PM: Right.

JH: He's now pretty much full-time Paul McCartney's drummer, but at that time he was not that yet. But he'd played with Me'shell. And I knew he was a really heavy character, I mean, a really soulful player, really unique musician.

PM: Right.

JH: I'd always wanted to work with Mark Ribot, and had only worked with him on a track for a compilation record where he came in and did an overdub. And I'd seen him work with T-Bone. I'd been in the studio when he was working, and was really I enamored with him as a guitar player.

PM: So cool, yeah.

JH: I never had a chance to work with him. So I kind of imagined this idea of Brian Blade and Abe and Brad Mehldau and Ribot, and a bass player named David Pilch, who—

PM: I know him from the Henrys. You ever become aware of a band he plays with in Toronto called the Henrys?

JH: No.

PM: Oh, they're amazing.

JH: I should ask him about that. I'm going to see him tomorrow. I knew him because Street used him on a lot of things. And he's been touring with K.D. Lang forever. And again, we had a lot of friends in common. He would play in K.D.'s band with Abe. He played a fair amount with some other friends of mine. And I met him through Street, and we hit it off. And I love his playing.

PM: Yeah.

JH: And I think Brad Mehldau is very unique among his generation of jazz pianists—

PM: Truly.

JH: —because he doesn't always think of himself as a jazz player. He's a musician, that's his orientation, but he doesn't limit what he does based on that.

So it was a roomful of people I really had never worked with before, but an amazing group of people to have in the room at the same time.

PM: Was it intimidating at all?

JH: Well, yes and no. I mean, I guess I won't say it was intimidating, it just was wildly exciting.

PM: Cool.

JH: I guess I had enough confidence in what I was doing at that point and I believed in the songs enough. And these people all had demos of the songs and had been very receptive to them, so I knew they were coming out of thinking that the material was really great.

PM: Right, so no reason to been intimidated, then.

JH: But it was incredibly exciting to be thinking, "I'm about to go into this room, with these unbelievable resources"—and there's not much you can imagine not being able to accomplish to your satisfaction.

PM: You bet.

JH: Also, though, I'm never one to have an idea beforehand, like "This is what I'm going after"—the way I think Prince works. He goes in and I think he's got an idea, "This is how this goes."

PM: Right. "Here's your part." [laughs]

JH: And either you can give it to him or you can't. And you're gone, or he plays it himself.

PM: [laughs]

JH: But I've always worked with the idea that you get people into a room—you'll be a good casting director, and then you find out what it sounds like. There was no strictly preconceived idea what this was going to sound like. But I really believed that if I got these people in a room, that the sensibility that had been the point of departure in writing this material was going to be inherently present, though as an ensemble we were going to go somewhere that was unique to these particular people, at this particular moment in time, playing together. And we jumped in with that idea, all of us knowing: A, there was going to be some orchestration added later; and B, that Ornette Coleman was going to be present on this particular song.

PM: Unbelievable.

JH: So everybody's recording imagining—not able to imagine exactly what he was going to do but imagining that his presence was going to take the floor at some point.

PM: Right.

JH: And other than that, there was absolutely no conversation about what it was going to sound like.

PM: Wow.

JH: I mean, I know everybody referred to my demos because I'd given them stuff where I was playing piano and there were string melodies and that kind of thing coming in. But I promise you there was very little conversation about what this was supposed to be.

PM: [laughs]

JH: All these people had played together at some point or another, though not all together. But Brian Blade had played with Brad Mehldau in Joshua Redman's band; Abe had played with Ribot; Ribot had played with Pilch. But these people had never all been together before.

PM: Beautiful.

JH: Also, Me'shell Ndegeocello came in—she kind of invited herself into it, much to my delight—to play bass on some stuff. But I basically said, “Here are the days we're working. Show up whenever you want and play whatever you want.” And she was there for maybe two of the four days when we recorded everything.

PM: Cool.

JH: So we went in, without conversation about what the record would sound like, and we counted it off. And they just kind of became what they became. And one song influences what the next song sounds like, and that influences what the next song sounds like. And you start discovering what it is that you're doing, which is very much how I write. I don't ever sit down with an idea and say, “I need to put that into a song.” The process of writing is the process of me finding out what I'm writing about.

PM: [laughs]

JH: And I realized that that was exactly the way we were recording, we're recording to find out what we sound like.

PM: Amazing.

JH: I knew it would be musical. These people are all wildly gifted and all have a real definite point of view. This is really my only restriction. I only want to work with people who really have a point of view. I don't want the guitar player to say, “What do you want me to do here?” “I want you to *play* here.”

PM: [laughs]

JH: “That's what I want you to do. I want you to lay down the law.”

PM: [laughs]

JH: I just truly believed that between all of us it would be musical, and it would be sound, it would be credible, and these guys wouldn't let it go somewhere else. We'd all know it if it went off the ramp, if it wasn't fully realized or uniquely realized unto itself.

So we just had at it, three songs a day, four songs a day, whatever. Live vocals, because I found myself for the first time just singing, leading. I mean, I've got Mark Ribot, I don't want to play guitar.

PM: [laughs]

JH: I'm not interested. And it wasn't going to be two guitars. I don't want to hear myself strumming through this.

PM: Right.

JH: I want to be a bandleader. All my phrasing dictates a certain amount of policy. So I just set up to be a singer, and that was my role in the recording.

PM: Were you off in a booth, or just in a room with sound baffles.

JH: There wasn't really room for me to be off in a booth. There were too many of us.

PM: Yeah, and then you can't see everybody right anyway.

JH: And I couldn't. I wound up in the machine room, which was the room between the control room and the lounge, where the actual two-inch tape machines live. There was no other place to put me where I could have any isolation at all if I needed to fix anything later—anything that could be fixed.

PM: Right.

JH: But I couldn't see anybody except the back of the engineer's head through the window in the control room.

PM: [laughs]

JH: It put me in a funny kind of abstract place, which I quite enjoyed. There's all this—through the headphones there's all this conversation and noise going on.

PM: Wild.

JH: And again, I don't want to bore you with too much information.

PM: Believe me, it's the furthest thing from my mind.

JH: There were two things that—I don't know how to say it. There were a couple of, like, spiritual presences that were very influential to that record. One of them was Ornette, because we were all just imagining the fact that he—nobody could believe that he was going to be willing to be involved.

PM: No kidding.

JH: Even his own people said he never had done that before, never had been a sideman to anybody.

PM: Wow.

JH: So this idea that he was going to, at some point, materialize and contribute, it was just this wild idea that everybody was kind of giddy about.

The other was the idea of Richard Pryor, about whom I'd written this song [the album's opening track, "Richard Pryor Addresses a Tearful Nation"], which was the whole thing

that took me to the idea of Ornette in the first place.

PM: Right.

JH: I found myself writing this song, in which I felt I was, in my own mind, representing Richard Pryor—it was my idea of Richard Pryor in a song. Where I thought he was and how I thought he got there.

PM: That whole thing is so amazing.

JH: Well, it was a very simple idea when it was happening, before I knew what was happening. But I found out that everybody—and I mean this literally—everybody there turned out to be not just casual Richard Pryor fans, but kind of big ones. People who just really, without any convincing, recognized immediately—not that he was just a very funny man, but that he had an incredibly significant influence on a period of American culture, and that his kind of tragic life didn't exist despite his gift. It was all part of it. Like, Me'shell loves Richard. Brian Blade loves Richard. Everybody had a real connection to Richard from the first time it came up, when people saw it as a song title on the demo. And you got to understand that I talked Brad Mehldau into being involved just with the idea that he was going to play on that one song.

PM: [laughs]

JH: But in the back of my mind I'm thinking, "Well, if he shows up for this song and things go well, maybe he'll play another song." But he just stayed. He just came back every day for four days, because he kind of found himself intrigued by this group of people and what was happening. I think Brad was really enamored with what was happening on this record, and I think he realized very quickly that he was a significant part of what was happening.

PM: He was huge on that record.

JH: And bigger than I imagined him to be before we started.

But there was just this presence of Richard. And like a lot of studios now, everybody's headphone mix is a little Mackie eight-channel board. You have your headphones, and you can, at your station, dial up your own mix.

PM: Right, the mo-me thing.

JH: You can push your own thing up. So we don't spend the whole day with people saying what they want more or less of. You sit there and you just give yourself what you need. And, like, on track eight, we just had a live Richard Pryor performance running perpetually.

PM: You're kidding me.

JH: Anybody could just reach over and push up a fader and get a blast of whatever Richard was going on about at that particular moment.

PM: [laughs] That's amazing.

JH: So through the whole record, even, no matter what the song, there he was.

PM: Unbelievable.

JH: He was a really influential component, even though in a completely abstract way, I suppose.

It was definitely—I mean, to that moment, that was most fun I ever had working. I mean, literally. I was anxious to take a dinner break. I hated to stop, because I'd look around the room at who's there, and I'm thinking, "We should just keep going."

PM: Right. "I'm experiencing a high point in my life right now."

JH: "This could go south at a certain moment, and we've got a lot of work to do. I don't want it to stop. There's too much happening here, there's too much to do."

And I found it just incredibly exciting. Maybe everybody thinks that way when they're in the middle of something, but even the other musicians, who were involved, collectively, in hundreds of really unusual and great projects, everybody seemed to think that something very unique was happening. And it was really a revelation to me. Those four days of working rebuilt, for like maybe the third time, my idea of who I was and how I was going to operate from that point on.

PM: And if you'll come full circle with me, then, there was another transition to make, bringing you to the atmosphere of *Tiny Voices*.

JH: Well, the way that I described making *Trampoline*, I was feeling my way in the dark, and by the time I got to *Fuse*, I felt like I was hitting the ground running. I understood my method at that point. I made *Scar* not really knowing how I was going to use a jazz tonality in a way that was authentic for me. I never want it to sound like, "Oh, I'm really into jazz. I'm going to try to write something that sounds like jazz music," but rather, I'm going to think the other way and invite those people into my world and see what it does to my thing, as opposed to me trying to sneak into their world.

PM: Right.

JH: So I made *Scar* not really knowing how that was going to work, and not really knowing if it would work in a way that felt authentic for me. But by the time I got to *Tiny Voices*, I believe that I had figured something out for myself that was uniquely my own, in regard to a musical vocabulary, a musical stance, if you will. I started writing songs for *Tiny Voices* and imagining a much broader, much more chaotic thing—where *Scar* had been very mannered, ultimately. The playing was immaculate, I think appropriately so. But I knew that when I started realizing the songs that were presenting themselves as the ones that were going to make up *Tiny Voices*, that it couldn't possibly be mannered and austere in a certain way that much of *Scar* is. In my mind, there's a certain austerity to the playing. But *Tiny Voices* needed to have a lot more chaos at its core.

And as a result, I decided that any orchestration that was going to happen—well, with *Scar*, I gave the songs to an arranger, and I went to New York and spent three days with various small ensembles to create the orchestration that's very controlled and very careful. And I thought that any of that orchestrated element that was going to come into play here, I didn't want to drop it behind the music after the fact like a velvet curtain, just to kind of add texture and give it a bit more of a grand feeling, like I think we did with *Scar*. This time I wanted those elements to be inherently part of the driving wheel of the song.

PM: Got it.

JH: I wanted that orchestration to be part of that exciting, live discovery, because I know that people play really differently—a guitar player is going to play really differently if he’s imagining, “Oh, yeah, he’s going to put some strings on this after.”

PM: Right. “I’d better leave room.”

JH: When there’s an orchestral idea happening right next to him in the moment, he’s got to get out of its way because maybe it’s going to take precedence, it’s going to take over.

I’d worked with Don Byron when I was touring with *Scar*. I was going on The David Letterman Show, and I wanted to take a buddy—additionally add to the band and make it a little bit more exciting. Just as a one-off in New York, I thought it would be fun to add something to the mix. And I met Don through a good friend of mine who’s the head of A & R at Blue Note. And we hooked up with Don, and I was completely enamored with his whole approach, and how wide open his musical scope is.

PM: Did he play bass clarinet on Letterman? What did he play?

JH: He played clarinet, I think. And then we parted company at the end of that moment. And I told myself, “I don’t know what my next record is going to be, but I know that it will involve him in some way.”

PM: [laughs]

JH: So I knew that when I was started writing for what became *Tiny Voices*. I already had this idea that Don was going to be involved somehow.

JH: And I started thinking more and more that the songs needed to, at least thematically, be a lot more aggressive, have a lot more going on. I wanted it to be much more raw than *Scar* was. So I started putting this idea together of how to assemble a particular kind of quote, unquote, orchestra to record live in a studio, so you get all that collision of events.

I’m really a big fan of take two and three, when people are—they’re starting to know the song well enough that they have confidence in what they’re playing and they’ve got an idea they’re really going to air out. But nobody’s really thinking of it yet as, like, *a take*. Everybody is still just kind of tearing it apart.

PM: “Hey, we’re still running it down.”

JH: Yeah. And there’s a particular moment where you’ve gone beyond people like learning the song and beyond where everybody starts to get careful and getting out of each other’s way, where they start hearing a few play backs and say, “Well, hey, now that I hear you’re doing that in the first refrain, I’ll clear that out for you.” Everybody is just kind of going.

And I decided that that was really what was going to be appropriate for this record, just a certain type of explosion, a certain amount of chaos. I don’t know how else to say that.

PM: Yeah.

JH: That’s just how it occurred to me. So I started putting together an idea of how to have an orchestra of a certain sort, but still of manageable size.

PM: Right.

JH: Through Don I met Ron Miles, the trumpet player who's worked with Don on a number of things. And I got a lot more than I bargained for there, because I tapped into the beautiful synergy they have because of their working relationship.

PM: Yeah, you can really hear that they've worked together.

JH: And they're just arranging together on the fly! Between takes, they start quickly making notes for themselves, to play melodies together, who's going to start playing a pad and who's going to go off.

PM: Yeah, they're like the jazz version of the Memphis horns, those two.

JH: Exactly. I didn't want it to be an anonymous horn section. I was listening a lot to *The Harder They Fall* soundtrack, and how often there are just the two horns, and you still hear them as individual voices. You get four horns and it becomes a blur of a section. You add a third part, then harmony becomes a lot more restricting. But two horns can be up against each other in a really different way.

PM: It's so much more raw, two horns.

JH: Yes. So the idea was, I was really developing a great communication with my touring band of that last year—David Palmer, the piano player, Jay Bellerose, the drummer, Jennifer Condos was the bass player. Chris Bruce, who is one of my favorite musicians, is the guitar player. And I've worked with him some off the road, but I'd never really recorded with him. So I brought him in, because I knew that he's got just a beautiful sense of what's needed—he comes up with beautiful parts. He's got great chops, but he doesn't play like anybody who plays as well as he does.

PM: I didn't know him before this record. Is he an L.A. or New York guy?

JH: He's in L.A. now. He's from Chicago. He used to tour with Wendy & Lisa when he was very young. He's toured with Seal a lot—he's got a very interesting background. But we met and became really fast friends, kind of bonded over our mutual love for Sly.

PM: Oh yeah.

JH: He kind of comes from that world. And he's got a beautiful sensibility, great melodic sense, just beautiful parts.

PM: Right.

JH: And then Patrick Warren, who I've known but never worked with—but I knew that if I put David Palmer as the keyboard player and Patrick Warren in the same room, and they've got all these samples and upright piano and organ and Wurlitzer and Chamberlain between them, that in a live situation, there's quite a large kind of orchestral sonic palette that's available. So that became the cast.

And I thought again, "One day we're all going to show up, and we'll see what it sounds like. I think I know, but I don't really know, but I think it'll be interesting." But unlike *Scar*, I didn't give anybody any fleshed out demos at all. I gave them only acoustic guitar and vocal demos or piano and vocal demos. It had been beneficial with *Scar* because people referenced the melodic ideas that I built in the strings, and everything on the *Scar* demos that were very developed. But I didn't want anybody having any preconceived notion about what this was supposed to be. I just gave them these skeletons. And people think I'm joking

when I've said this before, but I said, "Here are the songs. And there's this particular Luis Buñuel film I'd like you to see. And then we'll be ready to go."

PM: [laughs] *The Criminal Life of Archibald de la Cruz.*

JH: Right. And everybody showed up and I think the very first song we did is the first song on the record. And I think we played it three times. And again, we were still getting sounds and levels and balance with everybody. But it was really clear that everybody just jumped in with the completely right spirit and it had the right kind of chaos, thanks in no small part to Don Byron and Dave Palmer, who were both, in their own way, very much the loose cannons.

PM: Really? Oh, that's interesting info, yeah. They just kind of exploded into the scene.

JH: They did.

PM: Wow.

JH: I mean, if you want Don Byron to blow something up, you don't have to tell him twice.

PM: [laughs]

JH: That's just—

PM: "Get in there and make a mess."

JH: Yeah. I think he understood from the get-go, without even talking about it a lot, what his job was, why I had called him.

PM: [laughs]

JH: But it's funny, because a lot of people tend to think of *Tiny Voices* as just *Scar* part two, because they hear a strong influence of a jazz tonality in the instrumentation. But I hear them as such completely different animals.

PM: Oh, yeah. I mean, if you like jazz, they're totally different animals. To me, I really felt like I was sitting in the room for *Tiny Voices*. It was much more like I was there.

JH: Well, that was the idea of having that excitement of a live take. And also that there's nothing sacred about it. I mean, we had the benefit of these live takes, and then the engineer and I, when everybody went home, we dumped a lot of it into Protools and cut stuff up and treated it and flew it back in. I didn't treat anything with any reverence, nothing like, "That's the kind of sound that Don likes for his clarinet." I couldn't have given a shit.

PM: [laughs]

JH: And we'd run it through an amp and process it in all kinds of ways. I told the engineer before we recorded, "We're going to get the excitement, and the songs are going to be arranged out of the chaos of this live experiment. But then, once everybody goes home, we will not revere the live element, we'll not treat it like, 'Hey this was recorded live in a room.' That's not a badge of courage. This is just the best way I know to get this as a resource on the tape."

PM: And that's where [engineer/mixer] Husky Hoskulds' genius comes in.

JH: Right. He's a very unique character. And he was as important as anybody in the room, as far as what it became sonically. We just started treating things, take the drum track and run a mono signal. Husky has all kind of things he does when he mixes that are unique to him. Just as an example, where he would take—I don't know if you've heard the Solomon Burke record that I produced. Have you heard that record?

PM: Sure.

JH: I produced that, and Husky was the engineer on it, and a number of the same musicians, Chris Bruce on guitar, Dave Palmer on piano, Jay Bellerose on drums.

PM: Right.

JH: But the idea of taking the women singing backup on a couple of songs on *Tiny Voices*, and running it through an amp, and re-miking it using a Victrola horn with a microphone at the tulip end of it, the tiny end of the Victrola horn, so you're doing in reverse what a Victrola does. Instead of taking a tiny signal and projecting it out. You're taking a broad sound—

PM: [laughs] And sucking it down.

JH: In an analog sort of way, you're compressing it into a sonically tiny space, but the whole tonal spectrum of the original sound, the whole character of the voice, is there.

We did that a lot on *Scar*, actually, when we recorded the orchestration. Even though we had an orchestra there, just to cover ourselves we put up the big beautiful [Neumann U-] 47's. But pretty much all we used of the orchestration was recorded through a Victrola horn with a [Shure] 57 in it.

PM: [laughs]

JH: Like if you listen to the strings on the song "Stop"—a lot of people ask me if it was just a really unique Chamberlain, because it sounds fucked up, but it's the real orchestra playing. Husky just recorded it backwards through a horn.

PM: It really does sound like a Chamberlain. That's amazing.

JH: But that's an idea he got from Edison. There are old photos of Edison recording, where he's got all these big horns in different shapes and sizes and lengths, and he's recording sound. It's one part of how Husky thinks.

PM: Unbelievable. What kind of a dude is he? How old is he and stuff?

JH: Oh, I think he's maybe 36 or so. And he's from Iceland.

PM: Get out!

JH: He grew up some in Boston, and lived some in Iceland when he was a kid. He's a very unusual character.

PM: And so where did you run into Husky?

JH: Well, Husky cut his teeth as an engineer. He was a second engineer to Tchad Blake and Mitchell Froom for about eight years.

PM: Holy jeez.

JH: He was camped at the Sound Factory, which is my favorite studio in L.A., for eight or nine years with them. But I met him through Craig Street, when we were starting to make *Scar*. Street had just made a record with Husky. And I forget how he met Husky—I think through Tchad. I guess his regular guy wasn't available. And he was really blown away by Husky, because he has such a unique point of view, and by the record that they made together right before, like two days before we started *Scar*. Street said, "You know, this guy is really unbelievable, and he's really cheap."

PM: [laughs]

JH: "I can't believe how interesting he is. I'm not sure we shouldn't hire him to do this record." I had somebody else in mind, somebody that I'd worked with before. And so I came down to this session, and they were working on a Manhattan Transfer record, which I couldn't care less about.

PM: [laughs]

JH: But I heard these rough mixes that Husky did, and it didn't matter to me that it was Manhattan Transfer, it was something just organically unbelievable that was going on, something sonically brilliant that was happening.

PM: Wow.

JH: And so I said, "We should hire this guy to record the record." And then, by the end of the first day, it became completely clear to me that he was so inherently responsible as much as anybody else for what was happening, I knew that he should also mix the record, because nobody was going to understand what he was putting on the tape and what we intended to do with it if it wasn't him.

PM: Unreal.

JH: You can't record that way and then hand it off to somebody and expect them to make some kind of sense out of it. I mean, with *Scar* we didn't use any Protools at all, but we—oh, well we did on the instrumental song. But it was just the way that he put forth a point of view. I mean, most engineers that I know would record something with as much fidelity as possible. They'd say, "Well, if you want it to be kind of fucked up sounding, we can do that when we're mixing. But it's my job to make sure that it gets on tape in a pristine fashion." But Husky's thought is just like when a guitar player makes a choice, "For this song I'm going to go through this amp and use these pedals, and that's what you're going to get. If it's not working, I'll try something else."

PM: Right.

JH: What he chooses is going to influence how everybody is hearing what's happening, and they're going to play accordingly. So Husky listens to a song like the musicians would and starts treating sonically what he's hearing, so that people are hearing back a treatment of an idea. For instance, on the Richard Pryor song on *Scar*, the way that he treats the kick drum—Brian Blade played it that way because of how he heard it. Brian heard Husky treating it that way and then said, "Oh, if that's how you're going to use it, then I'll play it

like this.”

PM: [laughs]

JH: “If you’re going to put it on the middle of the track with that kind of prominence, that kind of tone, then I’ll play this way.” And it’s a revelation to consciously realize that if you don’t commit those ideas to tape, you can spend the rest of your life trying to chase them down again. You’ll be saying, “What was happening that day when we heard that? We were listening back and it was so amazing, but now where is it? It’s not on tape anywhere.” I’ve been in this situation a million times where something is happening in tracking that everybody responded to, and that’s why you thought it was a take in the first place, but you get back to mixing it weeks later and you’re going, “Where is it?”

PM: [laughs]

JH: “We *heard* it.” But those treatments are all gone, they were all temporary. You’ve been monitoring with those sounds, but not committing any of it to tape. So Husky’s whole thing is that, if you allow him to do it—I’m sure not everybody does—but if you hear that sound, that’s what should be on tape. If the piano miked with a Victrola horn was the sound that we loved, that better be what goes on tape. That’s how it happens.

PM: Amazing. Well jeez, Joe, you’ve been so generous with your time, I hesitate to take any more.

JH: Well, it’s not a problem, Frank. It’s my pleasure.

PM: How much you gave me on the processes on these different records, it’s fascinating. I’ve never had anybody talk so extensively and so inside the process, and I’m sure a lot of the readers will really, really dig it.

JH: Oh, thank you.

PM: I had a host of other questions, but I’m not going to get onto them, because this is just too cogent and too stream of consciousness beautiful. It’s great.

JH: So you don’t want to know Madonna’s shoe size or anything.

PM: [laughs] I guess we’re just not going to get into that, unfortunately.

JH: Very good.

●