

Bruce Iglauer interview

At his house, Magnolia, Chicago.

September 11 1982.

I remember a few years ago I read an article, just before Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers made it, in fact I think he had gone through a bankruptcy or something, it was a story in, I suppose, Rolling Stone, and he said, 'If I don't make it within two years, I'm going to quit music.' As it happened, he made it. The idea of Magic Slim saying 'If I don't make it within two years I'm gonna quit...!' See the great confusion between recording and performing. If you don't ever really expect to make big bucks performing music, if you're performing it because you want to - this doesn't just go for blues, it goes for really any kind of music - and you're willing to even, if necessary, have a day job, if you see yourself as an amateur or semi-professional, the way most musicians do, then you're going to keep playing whether or not you make records. If somebody wants to sit around and listen, or even if you want to listen, you're going to keep performing. And the record business is a business, it's a matter of selling pieces of vinyl to make money. It's pretty hard to make enough pieces of blues vinyl to make money. Certainly, with the nature of the radio business, which is essentially paying people to listen to advertising by giving them something that they won't turn off. You know, essentially you're buying peoples' ears, and selling advertising, and the music works as the lure, the bait, for the fish hook of advertising.]

There's always the BBC.

I'm talking about the United States. We're not talking about field recordings by the Library of Congress either, we're talking about the commercial record industry and the commercial radio industry. It's been harder for blues, which is a - certainly in terms of the radio listening audience, to a certain extent - not always a mass-market taste, to maintain its place on the radio. Well, if you don't get your records played on the radio, you don't sell records to speak of. And certainly if you're a commercial record company, in the sense of a Chess or a Columbia, or a Motown or an Arista or a Warner Brothers - a real commercial record company, not in the sense of the 'blues labels' - a real commercial record company in certainly the sense that Chess desired to be, I mean who's fooling who? Leonard Chess certainly liked blues a lot, but he recorded blues because he was selling blues records. And when radio moved to be less regional and more national in its programming, and he was a regional record company, he began recording more and more music that he thought would be nationally accepted, like Pottery Connection, for example, if you remember that one, and a lot of commercial black music of other kinds, and attempts at commercial white music. You know, Leonard Chess was selling records. He sold blues records when he thought he could sell blues records, he sold jazz records, he sold doowop records, he sold some rock records.

What's Alligator going to do if the blues thing doesn't last?

Well, we've been doing this now for eleven years, and the blues thing hasn't 'lasted' during that period of eleven years at all. When I started it was at the tail end of the famous **Great White Blues Boom**, not to be confused with the **White Blues Revival**. I love the concept of, you know, of this young long-haired white guy sucking the pounding heart out of a black corpse and consuming it, and thereby reviving the music. First having proclaimed the living body to be dead! I shouldn't, you know. I'm white, I can't be mean to white people. I married a white girl. Only briefly. It's a **Bob Koester** joke. There have been a lot of the famed Peaks and Valleys that we've heard so much about. In 1971, when John Mayall still was a name to conjure with - hard to believe, isn't it - there was a large untapped white market for blues. By 1974, 75, because of the change in white radio, that market was already pretty dissipated. And radio's real crucial here. Then, apparently without radio, things began happening again, around 1977, 78. The George Thorogood thing, the **Blues Brothers** thing. White rock tastes moved past Yes and Genesis and Emerson Lake and Palmer, the 'show off how many different settings your synthesiser has' type of rock, to - 'gee, let's get drunk and dance and have a good time.' And lo and behold, simple music came back. Right now, simple music is still back, but diverse - I would expect there would be a swing to more complex music and synthesiser rock, followed by somebody rediscovering three chords and a back-beat. And I think that's going to happen for some time, because three chords and a back-beat has a lot going for it. For the white audience I think blues is essentially interpreted as a branch of rock'n'roll. There are certainly blues purists that buy Alligator records, and there are people who don't buy anything but blues. But there are an awful lot of people who'll buy a Koko Taylor album and then turn around and buy a George Thorogood album, or buy a Talking Heads record, or a Bob Marley record. I think music tastes in that respect have become more diverse. We have yet to talk about the huge and almost totally unexplored black market. Why is it that our friend **Mr. ZZ Hill** can, without a lick of white airplay, sell between three and four hundred thousand copies of a record that was made, I think, in about three days in a little studio in Jackson, Mississippi, for probably a studio bill not a whole hell of a lot larger than what I spend. And certainly with a totally non-slick package. And the answer is that out there, for every one white blues fan, there are twenty black blues fans, or forty black blues fans, who have no relationship to anything that is of interest to **BU** readers, or even **Living Blues** readers, and who see blues as one type of black pop music that they like, and who are an audience that heavily buy singles, and are totally responsive to the radio and no other media, and have a totally non-collector mentality. In the best sense. They buy the music because it moves them, not because they think they ought to, not because they're concerned with its historical value, not because the person made some good 78s, not because of the label. You know, a lot of people buy Alligator records because they're on Alligator, which I'm real proud of - but because they like what they hear, and they hear it on black radio stations. And I would say that the black blues market right now is much larger than it was ten years ago. That there's a real blues

blues revival going on in the black community. And a whole revival of not only blues, but music with emotionally substantial lyrics, slower songs. More meaty lyrics, as well. I mean, have you heard the latest record by Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, called the Message? It's a very, very socially conscious black rap record, that ends with an arrest scene like on Stevie Wonder's, but maybe better, if anything, more effective. It's a real exciting record, lyrically. I don't dance that way, so it's not as exciting to me as a dance record. But I think that the music, the blues, is going to be constantly revitalising itself out of the black community, and that right now we're going through what I would perceive as the third or fourth revival of white interest in the blues, as versus White Blues Revival. But more important, we're going through probably, in the last twelve or fifteen years, the biggest revival of black interest in the blues, and the greatest period of blues' social acceptability in the black community. And that's real exciting. As to whether Alligator's going to be able to tap that market, we keep working at it, but it's a gambler's market. And it's a real problem. See, a label like Malaco, or a label like Chess, when Chess was happening - Malaco's the label ZZ Hill is on - is concerned about the immediate artists that are happening for them. They're pop oriented. When I say 'pop', they're oriented to getting records on the charts and selling them now, they're not oriented towards whether the record's going to be selling next year. The record's going to be out of print next year. Alligator has everything it ever produced in print, and really in print, and available, on the market, which partly has to do with my ego, since I produced most of them - saying, 'Gee, that's a good record' - it's not always such a good economic decision. It partly has to do with long-term artist commitments, it partly has to do with my semi-collector mentality, in fact. But I feel that the people that discover blues should be able to find these records, and these are records of quality. Keeping that catalogue in print, and making those long-term artist commitments... there are certain artists who I manage who I'm making no money from. Anybody in his business-right mind would simply cease recording those people, cease managing them, attempt to punch holes in the corners of the jackets of the records that didn't sell, and sell them to a schlockbroker for 50 or 75 cents, or 25 cents, to make back whatever could be made, and go looking for another artist. And my problem is I have certain artistic commitments, and emotional commitments, that have nothing to do with selling vinyl, they have to do with making records I like, and managing musicians I like. And that's in conflict with the 'go-for-broke' attitude with which one should approach the black market. That is, you put a single out, you test-market it, you test it on radio stations, if you get some response you hustle it harder, if you really begin to get some response you go back and release an album. And if the single doesn't sell you punch a hole in it, or sell it for the cost of the vinyl. You know, I mean 90% or 95% of all records lose money, in all fields of music. And if I was going to have a proper orientation to the black market, that is the way I'd have to go. Now I sell some significant numbers of records, black, by the standards of Alligator. Every once in a while things happen. A black radio station

in Oklahoma City started playing Koko Taylor's second album a couple of years ago. We sold 3 or 4 thousand LPs and 8-tracks, a supposedly obsolete tape form, in Oklahoma. At the beginning of this year, a new black radio station in Memphis began playing Conversation With Collins, by Albert Collins; we sold a thousand LPs in Memphis in the period of a month. Of a 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -year-old record. [We sold about ¹¹⁰⁰⁰ copies of the first single we released on Koko Taylor, but only about 7000 of the second one. I can get good live radio play, but most of it is in the Deep South, where our distribution is the weakest, and we get burned by our distributors. And it's a real conflict, and what I ought to do is sell around the distributors, COD to the shops, but if I do that, eventually I don't have any distributors, and then nobody distributes my back catalogue. You know, those other albums that are in print that I want to be in the full-line stores, the stores that'll stock the whole catalogue. So I'm cutting my throat one way or the other. But I feel that the black market is where the real future of blues is going to lie. I think that there will be a hard-core white market, except in a period of real recession like this, such that we can afford to release a few good blues albums every year, and keep the catalogue in print. But I tell you, when I run out of jackets on certain items, and reprinting jackets is a big expense, it may be a real temptation to pull some records out of the catalogue. It's very discouraging right this minute. Well, between the economic situation, the situation with white radio, which is as bad as it's been for me in a long time, and it's been getting progressively worse since 1972. I suppose we should say Un-progressively worse. The situation with white radio is real difficult for us right now. The bookings are going on OK, but also the recession is causing record stores to stock the hits - and even if we can sell 2000 records in Oklahoma City, we're basically not producing the hits, and we're not fooling ourselves into thinking we are. We are more commercially-oriented than anybody who's come along in the blues field in years, starting with what I'd describe as collector mentality - as versus Malaco, who started wanting to sell units of vinyl, or the people who are presently recording BB or Bobby. You know, we have a larger staff, we're involved in artist management, we do a great great deal of promotion, we do a great deal of publicising, we're involved in booking, we service many many more radio stations than anybody else in the blues business, we service many many more reviewers and print media folks than anybody else in the blues business. We have much larger mailing lists. Which means we're the biggest gamblers. Typically, of what I know of Arhoolie and Delmark, they give away a couple or 300 copies of a new record. We typically, between in-store play copies, radio, and print, are giving away between 1500 and 2000 copies of a new release.

That's more than a lot of records sell.

Not Alligators.

You're obviously in a different league to the Delmarks...

Well, you know, I'm a former Delmark employee, and I'm not a hobbyist. I mean, my business is also my hobby. I do what I do 'cos I love it. But I don't do what I do with the idea that I shoulda' make money, or that I should work when I want to work, and I don't make totally non-commercial choices. I used to. I used to say,

'Hey, I like this band, or I like this tape, I'm going to release it.' But the realities of economics and keeping the damn catalogue in print, and keeping the artists working - I've got to consider each project very carefully.] I also have to consider my standing artists' commitments - I have four artists under contract: Koko, Lonnie, Albert, and Son. And I manage those artists, which is technically a conflict of interest, but it's one that the artists strongly encourage us to undertake. And I feel that I have to keep their careers moving, obviously. I've been working with Son Seals for nine years. Right now, he's working quite a bit, he's not really selling a significant number of records, although he has in the past. [About a year and a half ago we made a deal with a booking agency in Minneapolis, a good one, called Variety Artists, and we have been wearing the hats of booking agent, manager, and record company. Manager and booking agent are different functions. We placed all four of our bands with that booking agency. In the case of Albert and Koko, it's worked out pretty well. In the case of Son and Lonnie, it really didn't, and since that time, around the first of this year, we took their booking back. We didn't want to, we hate booking, it's a drudgery job, but we did it. So they didn't work as much for a period of about eight months, and both their careers suffered, and now are being rebuilt.]

So what's the future hold for those two?

Well, let me put it this way. In terms of Son Seals, by virtue of the fact that he has four albums, I've kept him on the road for a long time - I became effective booking about 1975, 76 - he's worked quite a lot. Although he's not well-known overseas, in this country he's one of the blues names that tends to be known. The pantheon right now, as far as the white audience, you got BB and Bobby, and immediately a huge gulf, and then after that, amongst the younger people, considering that the popularity of James Cotton and Otis Rush is based on records made eight or nine years ago, or older in the case of Otis, amongst younger people, people who tend to be known are Buddy and Junior, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee in a different sort of a league, since we're talking about a different sort of a style there, and to a great extent, at that point, my artists. Oh, and Albert King, I forgot. Albert Collins, Son, and Koko. Because Lonnie's the last artist that we took, and because radio had gotten even worse at that time, [Lonnie has been our most frustrating project. Well, not as frustrating as Fenton Robinson, who is the one artist who came to the label and, by mutual agreement, left the label.] But [I've never been able to take Lonnie's career as far as his talent would indicate it - should go, and I think that's because the media has been very closed to a new blues artist, or to blues in general. My artists in general are operating on the basis of media recognition from a few years ago, and such consistent live performances, and quality live performances, that they're able to keep their own careers, recycling their own reputations. If somebody goes to a gig and is excited and tells five friends, you've improved your artist reputation. We never built the touring base for Lonnie that we were able to for our other artists. We started at a time when everything was changing both in terms of the media, and economics. It got much much more expensive real quick to be out on the road. Meanwhile, clubs were losing money,

and were tending to book bands that would work for little or no guarantee, work for the door. For young rock bands who are sleeping four to a hotel room and splitting the money down the middle, and looking, like Tom Petty, for a pop future, they will go out and do that, and attempt to build a reputaion. For Lonnie, who would like to be in a position where he has a solid career that will hold him in the middle class mode of living for the next twenty years, playing blues, and who has already been playing blues for thirty years, it's a somewhat different situation. He can't ask sidemen - the leaders and sidemen system always hurts us here - he can't ask sidemen to go on the road for whatever might be made. He's got to give them salary. He's got to pay the transportation, he's got to pay the hotel, and he's got to pay commission. And he doesn't have a bankroll with which he can gamble and say, 'Well, I'm willing to go on my pcket for a year, and salary my sidemen, because I've saved all this money on my day job, or daddy gave me this money, or my girlfriend gave me a van...' You remember the Nighthawks? The Nighthawks are out of Washington DC, they've been together, I would guess, about ten years. They play some nice party-type blues, they're a good rock and blues band. But I really respect them for the way they took care of business. They started this band, they invested everything they had and everything they could borrow, in quality equipment, their own quality PA, so they wouldn't be at the mercy of club PA, or lose gigs because the club didn't have a PA, which is still a big problem for us, their own sound man, a truck to haul this stuff in, and they put themselves on salary. They formed a corporation, and they figured the minimum amount that they could live on, sleeping in, you know, efficiency apartments, doubling up, and just investing in their careers. They put together a mailing list, they did a lot of gigs for the door - they gambled. They gambled with their own money, and some years of their lives. And without much of any media support, and with no major record affiliation, they built up a huge following. I wish I could find a young blues act that could hustle together a little money. This happened because one of the guys in the Nighthawks has a wealthy father, and they were able to get a family loan, a personal loan. You know, I wish there was a blues band that was willing to invest in its future, and split things down the middle. I haven't seen that happen.

It's too much of the leader and sideman thing.

Yeah. It's hard to argue with the leader and sideman thing, in a way, because of the amateur nature of the music, and the spottiness of work. Bands like the Nighthawks never considered playing for fifteen dollars a man a night on 43rd Street. But at least they thought, 'OK, we'd rather play for nothing, opening for somebody big, somewhere...' than 43rd Street.

What happened with Fenton Robinson?

Well, it's not a complex story. I followed him around for a long time, I was a great fan of his, I still am a great fan of his, and he was under contract to a couple of other people over that period of time. He finally became a free agent, we recorded him, he unfortunately went to jail right after that - are you familiar with that? He was involved in an auto accident, somebody was killed, he was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. So we released an album with an artist who couldn't tour.

He was in jail for nine months. It pretty much killed the album.

It's a very good album.

Yeah, I think so too, I'm very proud of it. He came out pretty emotionally scarred, I'd say. I didn't realise how much at the time, because he's an extremely private person. He was before, he's much more so since. (We worked him in places we could.) You've seen Fenton perform live, I presume? (Well you know that Fenton's way of presenting himself is significantly different from most Chicago blues bands, in that however much he may talk about partying and having a good time, basically Fenton is not a good time artist.) He's a serious musician, and in many respects I feel Fenton would be happier in a lounge situation (where he was perched on a stool and wearing a suit, and people would listen to him like they'd listen to Kenny Burrell. But I don't book such places,) and those places don't know who Fenton is. (Fenton is perceived as a blues man, not a jazz man, or a serious improvising musician of any style.) (And places I would book Fenton, he would not always be as well-received as my other acts. People would say, 'Gee, the music was real good, people didn't buy very much booze.') Not a lot of people danced. People left after the second set instead of staying for the third set - which partly is a function of that fact that they aren't drunk - don't realise that they're actually loaded to the gills and should probably go home. (So we had a hard time booking him.) Meanwhile (Fenton was asking for more money than I could find in the market place. (Fenton is not realistic about the economics of the marketplace, and has chosen not to be. Of all the artists that I have dealt with, he's the one that has said to me most, 'I've been playing music for x number of years, and I deserve to make more money because of that.' I've heard that before, and I've said to musicians who've said that, 'The money you deserve to make, by the standards of the business that you're in, is however many dollars you can draw in the door. If a thousand dollars comes through the door, you should make a thousand dollars. If ten dollars comes through the door, you're a ten-dollar-a-night artist. You may not like it. It doesn't reflect the quality of your music, it reflects the realities of the world.' And most musicians understand it. But Fenton has chosen not to,) and from what I know of him from dealing with him now, which I occasionally do, he still chooses not to. We never sold very many of his records, except in Japan. He was not a good-selling artist for us. (It was too early, (I probably could have sold Fenton black, now, but I didn't know at that time how to do so. In fact I've even from time to time kicked around an idea of pulling a single off an old Fenton record, and trying it, but,...) I wasn't pleasing Fenton, I wasn't getting the work he wanted, I wasn't getting the money he wanted. He wasn't pleasing me in that he wasn't really giving me what I wanted to sell, as far as gigs, and I wasn't selling records, and we just reached a point of mutual frustration. Not anger, just resignation.) He played a gig I booked yesterday, in Michigan. We occasionally book gigs for him. (He recently turned down a tour of Europe, with Lonnie and Eddie Shaw, where all three leaders would have been making exactly the same amount of money, and he said he wouldn't work for that money. I said, 'This is OK money for Europe, you're not a big star in Europe, you aren't going to have to pay the rhythm section, they're

being paid separately, the only expense you'll have is a commission to me, and your food. You should go and make this money, and get better known.' And he said no. So I said, 'Well, if you'll name a price, I'll go back to the promoters, I don't think they'll do it.' And the lowest price I could get was over twice as much as the other artists were being offered, and accepting. And I told him, 'You aren't going to Europe,' and he said, 'Then I'm not.'

How much was that?

I can't tell you. I can say that, although it wasn't great money, by the standards of blues artists touring in Europe, it was not rip-off money. The expenses of touring, for a tour promoter, are great, because the way we do the tours, we sell the services of the band. The promoter has to pay all the transportation, and all the hotel and equipment rental, and all the publicity, as well as pay musicians. And I've been on these tours, and people say, 'Go to Europe, go to Europe,' but it's often 200 or 300 people a night seeing the band, it's often not huge concerts. Sure there's some festivals, but that's 45 minutes in a string of several performers. So, there's some magic to Europe, but more to people who haven't been. But Fenton sort of cut his own throat, and it's really a shame, he's really a great musician. It's interesting, when you go to the Checkerboard, and Fenton shows up on a blue Monday, I've seen Dizz announce Fenton, and Fenton gets announced in a different way. Literally a little hush falls over the room. He gets respect as being a guitar player of quality beyond that normally found in the blues, in terms of technical ability, and I think an ability to express a real subtlety of feeling in his playing.

I've never seen him down at the Checkerboard, I'd love to. It's not too often that he shows up there. He lives right around the corner. He lives by himself in a little tiny apartment, hardly ever goes out. Very very strange man.

Great musician.

Yeah, great singer, great player. Also a real ethical guy.

He's a muslim.

Yeah. And I think that's made him feel apart. Also he's a teetotaler, and when you're that, you don't hang around taverns a lot.

That TV show at Stages - how did that get arranged?

About a year ago Koko did a performance at a club called the Lone Star in New York. And there was a fellow there named Mike Melias. Mike Melias is a song-plugger, he works for MCA Music, Music Corporation of America, used to call them Decca, maybe not the same as British Decca, I'm not sure. Anyway, who also have huge holding interests in other fields of entertainment, including films. He saw Koko. Koko did 'That's the way love is.' Mike realised that that was with the MCA music catalogue, and it's his job to get musicians to record music from the MCA catalogue, so that MCA makes money. He's a song-plugger. That's somebody I'd like to have, I have publishing on over a hundred songs. The best surprise income I've had in the last couple of years was when George Thorogood cut a Hound Dog Taylor song. The real money in the whole record industry is in publishing. Yeah. Because there's almost no initial investment. You're talking about nothing or profit, as versus great loss.

Anyway. Mike called me up and asked me if I had a tape of Koko doing the song, because he wanted to use it to sell the song. I did, so I sent him one, and we sort of established this casual phone relationship, and he fell in with some video people at RKO, and originally they were going to do a show at Tramps, which is a club in New York that has made a very strong blues commitment over the last three years. And then Tramps wanted a big piece of the action, so everybody got mad at Tramps, and Mike came to me. Now Mike was middle-manning the show, and making quite a bit of money himself on it, and he was using me as his source of all knowledge. He approached me last spring, and we began mapping this out, and discussing artists. It changed form a lot of times, and in fact the form was still changing up to a week and a half before the show, although the artists were picked. And RKO did the bankroll, and it is not yet sold, unlike most video things, which are pre-sold. RKO's gambling on this one. Mike and I, incidentally, are no longer speaking to each other, because I was extremely upset by the way he was dealing with the musicians during the filming. I felt that he was dealing in a very patronisin/racist manner, and I took offence, and so did the musicians. Almost everybody hates me who was involved in that show, because I spent a great deal of time talking about the way the musicians were getting treated. I mean, people were asked to be there for sound checks at certain times. They told me the whole thing was going to be set up and lit the day before, that didn't happen. So it was obvious from the moment I walked in that everything was going to be running incredibly late. Nobody even took a moment to say, 'Gee, the musicians are going to be sitting here for four or five hours, doing nothing, wouldn't it be nice if we took one of these rooms, some chairs, a table, got the TV set from the office, sent out for a little bit of food...' At least made a place for the musicians to relax, rather than constantly telling them that they have to move out of the seats they're sitting in in the auditorium, because they have to hang lights over them. The musicians were just treated like cattle. When it was time for sound checks, suddenly everybody had to take dinner breaks. And it was obvious right along, which I wasn't quite ready for, that it didn't matter to anybody who the musicians were. It did afterwards, when they saw them, because they were very enthralled, by Koko and Albert in particular. Mike Melias sold himself on the basis of being a blues expert, when he isn't at all, when it was my expertise that he was using. Now I don't resent that, but I do resent the fact that the musicians would have made more money if Mike hadn't been making such a big piece of the action. I'd rather you didn't print that.

You used to work for Delmark. What gave you the idea that you should be doing your own records?

I actually didn't. I went to work for Delmark with the idea that I'd either work for Delmark for a long time, or I'd go on to graduate school. It never occurred to me to start my own label. However, early on, Bob promised me that I'd get a chance to produce, and it became fairly obvious that that wasn't going to happen, in the same way that I'll never promise anyone the chance to produce, I like to produce too much. Well Bob does too, but he had a hard time admitting it. Well,

I wanted to produce Luther Allison. That was my initial artist commitment, he was with the label. I came to Delmark because of Luther, and then he and I had a falling out, which has continued to this very day.

Yeah, I wondered why Luther wasn't on Alligator.

Yeah, a lot of people have asked that. It's because he's a jerk, that's why, and you can print that. He's a jerk, and he's a liar, and he's hypocrite, and I don't trust him. Yeah. He made a very important promise to me, and shook my hand on it, when he knew that he was not going to keep it, and it almost cost me my job at Delmark, very early on, which he knew was terribly important to me. And I have never forgiven him that, and believe me, I have forgiven a lot, of a lot of musicians, and I may be forgiving Albert Collins very shortly, if he doesn't call. I've forgiven him more than anyone. Anyway. That's because he's screwed up more than anyone. At any rate, I wanted to produce a Hound Dog record for Delmark. And Bob had never heard Hound Dog with his own band, and Hound Dog not with his own band was disastrous. Horrible. People couldn't follow him... Well, first of all, he couldn't work with any bass player. Hound Dog was very distressed when I wanted to record him without a bass player. He just thought, nobody records without a bass player. But you play without a bass player! Well, there's some logic there. So I couldn't get anybody else interested. I tried to get Arhoolie interested. Nobody seemed very interested. And then Wesley Pace, whose name may have come up at some point... he wrote the liner notes to the first Hound Dog album, well actually he did the research and I ghost-wrote them and put his name on them. He's not living here right now. He came along and he had a little money that he wanted to invest, and approached me about doing it. I remember I was working behind the counter at the Jazz Record Mart, the 7 West Grand Jazz Record Mart, back when Delmark was in the basement with the world's biggest roaches. You would have to stoop to work. And I was shipping clerk and operations manager of the label, and Wes said to me, 'I've got a thousand dollars, if I could find somebody who would do it, I'd invest that in the Hound Dog record, if I could eventually make the money back.' I remember, I was working behind the counter, it was a Tuesday night; I said, 'I'm your man.' And that was the birth of Alligator. But initially I did expect it to be a hobbyist label, in that I expected to be able to work for Delmark. Since I was starting out with a lot of the same distributors, it would be easy enough for me, I would come in early in the morning, pack the cartons that were my cartons. I was expecting to do a lot of direct mail sales. And I had a little tiny one-room apartment, a little bit bigger than this room, with a mattress on the floor, and a shipping table, which happens to be the same shipping table I still have, and I would pack and ship records in my apartment. And that was the birth of Alligator.

1972?

No, 1971. Actually, it may have been late 1970 that Wes came to me. Originally it was sole proprietorship and I owned the company. Now it's a corporation, and I own 100% of the stocks, and the buck stops here, and I like not being beholden to anyone. But it was only when I got involved in booking that I realised how complex everything was going to be. And I stayed with Delmark between September 71 when I released the

record, and June of 72, when I was using my telephone and time so badly between Alligator and Delmark, that Bob and I had a head-to-head, and he said, 'You're going to have to make a decision.' And he was right, absolutely, and he carried me for about four or five months, when I really was giving about half - half a week of work. On the other hand, when I started shipping for him I was taking home 30 dollars and working 60 hours. I feel a lot of affection toward Bob, but it's been a little bit difficult, because obviously, in the last ten years, Alligator has gotten both more publicity, and I assume more sales than Delmark. And in most comparisons that have been made, most comparisons indicate that we're doing a lot of things better, or at least more professionally - not even getting into terms musical aesthetics, but just in terms of marketing, and ability to present our artists and get across to the media. Bob is like a father to me, and was very definitely a father figure in my life. And it's very hard for a father to deal with a child having more success in the same field - and so there's a lot of tension between us in that regard. But we can't help but like each other.

I didn't ask him, but I was wondering how Bob felt about Alligator growing out of Delmark.

Well, Nessa grew out of his company, Testament grew out of his company, and some other things more indirectly. Yeah, Pete Welding was a Delmark shipping clerk, Chuck Esslin was a Delmark shipping clerk, Charlie Musselwhite was a Delmark shipping clerk, Maurice MacIntyre was a Delmark shipping clerk, Pete Wingfield, Wingfield the Bullet, was a Delmark shipping clerk. Do you remember that record? It was an English pop record. 'I'm eighteen with a bullet, Got my finger on the trigger, gonna pull it.' Very clever little take-off. He's a producer, and English producer, a good one. And I believe he was rather involved with Fleetwood Mac early on, and a bunch of other name people. The real rivalry was between myself and Steve Tomashevsky. I assume you've met Steve. Well, of course, he's left Delmark now, but he had the same job I had for a number of years, and he was running the label even more than I was. See, I came to the label right when Bob's first child was born, and Bob fell in love with fatherhood, and spent many many days at home, playing with his kid, and so I took over the running of the label, the day-to-day operations of the label, by default. But Steve was very aggressive about it. I have nothing against Steve, but he can't tolerate me at all. And part of it has to do with what most people perceive as Alligator's intense pushiness, - which is certainly true, we are very very pushy people, when it comes to sales, when it comes to our artists, when it comes to our media image. You know, we're 'on' all the time. And if we can cut in front of somebody else in line, we'll do so, because we're operating with no capital, we have nothing to fall back on.

Even now?

There is nothing in the bank. Everything that is made is spent. No, this company makes no money. Some of the employees make money. I'm not one of them. But I have some other advantages. For example, you're sitting in company headquarters here. You know everyone works here.

I had gathered. How many are there?

Three, besides myself. One works back there, two others and myself upstairs. And we had four others, a total of five, at one time, but early this year I let the other guy go, because of money. I have a woman who sits at that desk and runs the mail order business, does shipping, and college radio promotion. Mindy upstairs does rational marketing, album-rock radio promotion, if you know what I mean - the dwindling number of stations - some direct booking, and deals a great deal with our distributors. And we're all publicists. Andy is the operations manager, controller, deals with the booking agency that's still handling Albert and Koko, he's our liaison with them. Usually he's talking with them five or six times a day, and works with the listener-supported public radio stations. I do, of course all the A&R, and anything involved with the music end of things, although I get input from everyone. And I do all of the international business, including all the international booking, all the overseas tours. I work more closely with the artists than anybody else, oh - I work all the black radio stations, that's my job. I'm in charge of publicity, that is I keep up to date on all the reviewers, all the mailing lists, the publicity correspondence, as well as read the forty magazines we get in. And I also pick the priorities. And sometimes I ship, like last weekend I shipped, because we had new reggae releases, and I wanted to get them out, so I spent the weekend in the basement packing records. And I still am in charge of unloading the trucks.

Yes, I was interested to see reggae on this catalogue. Well, it's a logical extension. I got into it because I'm a reggae fan. That's what I listen to when I don't listen to blues. I wanted to release reggae for a long time, and I was looking for the right act, and through a very slimy British booking agent named Denis Vaughn, who I no longer speak to, I happened to run across Black Slate, and I started dealing with them, and just liked it. Still like it. And I've had reggae enthusiasts in the company for a long time - Andy in particular takes care of a lot of my reggae business. And it's a logical extension, it's a black roots music. I'm selling it primarily to a white audience, the demographic of which is extremely similar to the white blues demographic - male, well-educated, between 25 and 35, middle- to upper-middle class, you know. I know who buys our records. Obviously beyond the stage of being a straight ahead rock'n'roller, I mean, when you listen to blues you're already opening your horizons - when you listen to reggae it's another branch of opening your horizons. And of course there's a lot of crossing-over with jazz people to, in terms of that demographic. I feel that reggae falls within our company slogan of Genuine House-rocking Music. And also, to be frank, I saw it as an area, at least at the time I got involved a couple of years ago, that had not been so exploited and so deluged into the marketplace, like jazz is right now. That there was a place for more sales. You know, I've considered from time to time releasing jazz records, and you look, and every month there are a hundred new jazz LPs, and I just wonder how I could compete. Every month now, there are about six new reggae albums, and about one new blues album. Or two new blues albums. I mean non-reissue albums. And when you get into legitimate reissues, there aren't that many of those. Most

of the reissues that happen to blues material, are bootleg releases. But Arhoolie's very blues-inactive, Delmark's very inactive. Testament is virtually out of existence. So you'll see blues releases on Rounder, and of course mine, and the Chess reissues have happened again, as you probably know.

That's how I caught up with Muddy Waters. I'm not sufficiently antique to have been buying them since I was four years old. Well, you'll notice from my record collection here, a) not a huge collection, and b) not a 78 in sight. I'm not a collector. Since I have access to three of the best blues collections in the world - Dick Shurman's, Jim O'Neal's, and indirectly, Paul Garon's pre-war collection, which I don't listen to, but I could if I wanted to - I see little point in spending a great deal of money buying records. Since I don't have a great deal of money. Almost everything you see there is blues records. A few reggae records. But my enthusiasm was relatively quick. I bought my first blues record in 1966, and by the first of 1970 I was in Chicago and in the blues business. I don't know. I was producing concerts by late '78. You know, it just ate me up.

How did you get to hear it, the first time?

I was a folky. The first live blues I heard was at folk festivals. At the University of Chicago Folk Festival in late January, early February 1966, I heard Fred McDowell. Then I went to Mariposa Folk Festival in Toronto in summer of '66, heard Sunnyland, Johnny Young, and Big Walter, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. And the next year at the University of Chicago Folk Festival, '67, the year of the great snow, I heard Skip James, Sippie Wallace, and Reverend Gary Davis, I think, that year. Didn't like electric blues, at all.

Well, one doesn't really, does one?

Well, I mean, when you're jumping a freight, even if you can get your amp in the freight car, there's nowhere to plug it in! No, really, I saw blues as a 'folk' music.

To have actually seen people like Skip James must be pretty amazing.

I remember, because I saw Fred McDowell, and I was really taken with Fred McDowell, and I went back to Appleton Wisconsin, which is about two hundred miles north of here, where I was going to college, and I looked in the only record shop that would do any special ordering, and I ordered a Fred McDowell album on Arhoolie, and I ordered it in February of 1966, and it got to the shop in October of 1968. And sometime around there I heard Hoodoo Man Blues, the Delmark album. I didn't like it. I remember even who had it, some other guy at school. But shortly after that I bought Muddy's Real Folk Blues album, the first Butterfield album, which I liked a lot at the time. You know, much more so than Mayall, the Butterfield band was a real crucial band in the white blues boom - probably because they were actually a good band. And they were the door-opening band for a great number of white people, not so much Mayall - although that Mayall Bluesbreakers album, everybody I knew owned that album.

I think Eric Clapton generally tried to make sure that people

understood just where he was getting his music from.

Yeah. The whole concept that 'You should like this music because I learned from it' to me seems a real false concept. It's kind of like saying, 'You should like to eat raw eggs because you like caramel custard.' You know. That's not a good reason to like music. Either you like the music because it moves you, you feel it, or you don't. And it should stand on its own, and not as being 'The roots of rock'n' roll.' I mean sure, I hear blues licks all the time. I also hear country licks all the time in blues records, and jazz licks. It's not that well-defined. When I hear straight blues rip-offs in rock'n'roll, it annoys the shit out of me. But when I hear blues-influenced rock'n'roll, it may not floor me. but I don't feel ripped-off, and I don't feel that somebody ought to come on at the end of the record, and say, 'The licks you just heard were appropriated from the following 78s...' Because Robert Johnson stole songs from Leroy Carr; we have a tradition of theft, it's a public-domain music to a great extent. There are individual personal things. On the other hand, Clapton having Muddy on tour with him, where Clapton fans fans who might never go and see Muddy, saw Muddy. Muddy might not be playing as well as he used to, but he's certainly a charismatic and emotional live performer. It's funny, because I think of Muddy as being old hat, and I neglect to go and see him. Of course, he hasn't performed in quite some time. And then when I do see him, I am constantly re-amazed at the strength of his performance, and the shading... have you read Robert Palmer's book, Deep Blues? You ought to get it, it just came out in paperback, and he does some real nice piece on the way Muddy Waters shades his vocals. It's not a technical part. [One thing Bob Koester taught me was that blues is primarily a vocal music, above all. And since voice is my favourite instrument, one of the reasons I don't listen to more jazz is that I like singing. A lot. And most white 'blues singers,' quote unquote, that is those singers who take blues material and attempt to sing it in the style with which it was originally recorded, rather than adapting it to their own feelings, offend me. And they offend me like I am offended by Al Jolson, and I find it equally unentertaining, and equally racist. Imagine BB King trying to sing like Neil Young.] Or like Meatloaf. I like the way Neil Young sings. One thing Luther Allison gave me years ago, and it's funny because I was just recalling it last night because I ran into the country music writer for the Chicago Tribune, who's got a new interest in blues and he came out to the show - I asked Luther back when I had him at my University back in 1969, which is how all of this really happened, when I proved that you could sell unknown, inrecorded blues artists to hundreds and hundreds of college students, by dint of good promotion. I still have the posters. There were three sets of posters, there was a handbill three and a half weeks in advance, then there was an 11 by 17 poster ten days in advance, and then there was a huge poster which we put up only four days in advance of the gig, and was so good-looking that we had to go back and re-poster every three hours all over the city, because they were being torn down. And there was psychology, because every single person who tore down one of those posters came to the concert. [At any rate, I asked

Luther who his favourite white blues singer was, and without thought he said, 'Johnny Cash.' And I'd never listened to Johnny Cash at all, that was really a revelation to me. And the acceptance of country singers, and the popularity of country singers in the blues community is really quite amazing. It's white blues. Well, consider that it's cross-cultural. It's poor, it's country - out in the country as versus in the city - scuffling white people, with the same concerns as poor country black people, and the same directness, and the same simplicity of structure, and shading. And it has the same vocals. And ability to be played effectively by amateurs - you don't need your Prophet-4 synthesiser to sing Wild Wood Flower. It's the first song I ever learned on guitar.

Do you still play?

I picked up a guitar, and the period of about four weeks, when I was about sixteen, I learned everything that I seem ever to have been able to execute. In other words, I play as well as somebody who's been playing guitar for about three or four weeks. And after all this time, and having heard so many great guitar players, I still play exactly the same way.

I'm about the same.

I pick up a guitar and I play Wild Wood Flower, I play all my old folky tunes, all in C - that's because I can make fake Fs. But last week I sat around all week-end trying to figure out the chords to It's Raining by Irma Thomas. I still haven't got it all together. It's a blues ballad, do you know it? Recently I'm relating to the musicians particularly well, because I'm going through a period of Having the Blues About My Baby. I just broke up with somebody. I was with for a very long time, for a very tumultuous relationship, which seems to be the only kind I can have, with my crazy lifestyle, and I've been doing a great deal of Feeling The Blues, and listening to blues to get rid of the blues, which is of course the emotional function of the music. Yeah. Blues makes me feel better. Feeling as though you're a damp washcloth being wrung out. If you twist it up, at the end you feel better. As versus getting mildewed. Or rotting.

Or just smelling bad in the back of a cupboard somewhere. Obviously, working in your home gets crazy. I don't have days off, I don't have sick days. [If I'm sick, I'm sick in my office; my desk is in my bedroom.]

Do you like that arrangement?

[In many ways, no. I very rarely take vacations, I work many hours. If I were married, or had a woman, or were living with somebody right now, and had planned to do anything right now, Albert Collins would have just obliterated that plan by not calling me at eight o'clock this morning. So I'm sitting by my phone, from now until either Albert calls, or I know he's blown his gig. The gig's in California, and unfortunately, if he starts on schedule, he doesn't start for another hour and a half. It's part of a festival, a blues festival, and this guy's worked with Albert before, and he knows Albert's a notoriously last-minute guy. There are other acts, so what will happen is he'll shuffle the acts while waiting for Albert to show up, and Albert will play when he appears.] Now what's happened

that Albert's bus has had a technical problem somewhere between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and Albert, rather than calling me to report this, has attempted to get it fixed, and his excuse will be that he's 'booking,' that is, attempting to move as quickly as possible, when actually I could cover for him much more effectively were I to call the promoter and say, 'Albert's in San Luis Obispo, and they've just repaired the transmission, and he'll make the best time he can, and he'll be there in two hours.' So that Albert looks more professional. He instead will say that he wanted to look more professional, and therefore he didn't call, because he was hurrying. And as you may have noticed, we've had this conversation before. I almost went out to California last night to beat my head against the wall in person, and then I decided not to, and I may go to California in a few days. It's like that, I mean if I had had any plans for the weekend... I was very worried about this situation Thursday, I made plane reservations, I did call up somebody I was supposed to have dinner with on Friday night and say, 'Hey I don't think I can have dinner with you because I'm flying to California.' Last night, I was up till four in the morning, hauling amplifiers around and moving microphones, and getting people paid, and doing things, being a roadie basically. I have no hobbies, I worry about my business all the time. So for a woman it's a real difficult thing, I need an obsessive, compulsive woman. So what else can I tell you about the company?

I wanted to ask you about the Living Chicago Blues series. Ah, one of my babies. Of the things that I've done, my greatest sources of pride with the label, of the records I've done. Let me see the records I like best. My first one, because it's my first one, and because I loved Hound Dog; the Professor Longhair record; the first Albert Collins, because I was so pleased to record a Albert; the third Koko Taylor, because I took her beyond what either she or I knew she could do, and specifically because of I'd rather go blind. It's more that I can pick cuts, even, that I like. Fenton's As the Years go Passing by, that's one of the best things I ever did. There are a couple of Sam Seals things that I'm just crazy about.

I really like his live album.

Yeah, I like it a lot too, although it could have been better-sounding if I'd known more. I'm trying to think... there's some things on the first Lonnie Brooks album I'm really happy about. At any rate, the Living Chicago Blues series is a real source of pride for me, and part of the reason that that series happened is because of Sonet records, who had my line in Europe for years, and who have been a great source of both encouragement and finance, over the years. They don't make money on me, they consider me to be an investment to further the art. I'm their favourite charity. And this series was inspired by Samuel Charters' series for Vanguard, the Chicago Blues Today series, which was again another crucial set of records when white people came to know about Chicago blues. The series I've owned for years I've listened to many times, especially the very good Junior Wells material, and JB Hutto. It seemed more important musically than it turned out to be, in that we began learning afterwards that people were capable of even better

performances. At that time those seemed like awfully good performances. I kept hearing bands that I would like to do full albums by, and looking at my financial situation and my commitments, and thinking, 'If I do a Jimmy Johnson album, I don't do a Son Seals album, and I've told Son that his album is next. So I began thinking about this series in terms of three bands per album, and I approached Sonet and laid it out. The principals of Sonet were here, and we laid it out on a napkin in a Peruvian restaurant, and I said, 'What I would like is for you to put up half of the production costs, in return for which I will give you European rights in perpetuity, that is rather than increments or a five-year contract.

And they will be on a no-royalties basis.' Which meant I had to go to the artists and say, If you want to do this you're not going to make royalties from Europe, you know, I'm going to tell you that right out front. Without Europe we can't do this. But none of the artists were signed to the label, that is, unlike the Vanguard situation where everybody who was recorded had an option for two more albums, at Vanguard's discretion, which is why Junior Wells ended up on Vanguard, and Buddy Guy, and Otis Spann did a Vanguard album rather late in his career that he didn't want to do, but he was contractually obliged to do. I said, We're going to do this once and you're a free agent, and whatever you can get out of it in the way of a deal, bless your heart, go do it. I just like your music, and I want to announce that the scene is alive and healthy, that there are new musicians coming up, of all different age groups, that have either been on the scene for years and have never been recorded, or that have been recorded but have never been recorded right, like I felt that Carey Bell was. And I still feel the things I recorded with Carey are the best things that he's recorded. And there were a number of musicians that I felt very strongly about - Jimmy Johnson, who seemed to me to be someone of amazing quality for someone with no records; Left Hand Frank, because I love his style; Carey because of my frustration of not hearing on record what I knew he could perform.

You'd already done the Carey and Big Walter record by then. Yeah, but that was really a Big Walter record. And besides, if I'd had the chance to do that record a few years later, I could have made a much better record, well at least a better-sounding record. And maybe I would have been a better psychologist of Walter Horton, I'm not sure. Being Walter's psychologist is a difficult job. At any rate, Magic Slim because it's such a great band, and they hadn't been recorded, and also I considered the Magic Slim session to be the aesthetic failure of those three records - not because it wasn't a good session, but because the band was so much better - and I consider the failure to be mostly mine. It's a good session; it's not a great session. And Slim's capable of great sessions. Lurrie, because I still feel that he's the great up-and-coming hope, and although a completely strange person, the person most capable of a real work. And of course Lonnie, because I'd been hearing this journeyman musician for years, and all of a sudden I found somebody real creative hiding underneath - somebody who was not a juke-box copycat. And that was very exciting. So I wanted to do the unrecorded, the under-recorded, and incorrectly-produced musicians. It was really a dream,

and it took over a year. It was recorded in two different studios... three? I can't remember... two different studios, Mantra and Curtom. Magic Slim got shot, in an accident - he was in the middle of a shooting that didn't involve him, over at Porter's, and was out of commission for eight months, and I couldn't record him; Carey was under management contract to Bob Reidy, the piano player, who was not an easy person to do business with, and Slim was too, at that time. And so I had to do all sorts of endless negotiations with Bob, who has since totally disappeared - nobody knows where he is. There were just endless hassles. I can't even get my years straight. I think I must have started in '78, so I think the first session I did was... it was a winter session, it was at Mantra, and it was a Jimmy Johnson session. Real quickly I did the Jimmy Johnson session, the Eddie Shaw session, the Moose session, and the Left Hand Frank session - all around the same time I was recording Kokoi's Earthshaker album. I was feeling real balasy, business was going really well, I was real confident, I was selling a lot of Son Seals records, and I really felt like I could sell anything and make money. Billy and Lurrie I recorded at Curtom, Slim I recorded at Curtom, Pinetop I recorded at Curtom... who am I forgetting? I would guess that it was between nine months and ten months between when I started recording and when I finished recording, and over a year between the Jimmy Johnson session and when the albums actually came on the market. We got a great media response, and those albums have actually done alright by our standards. And unfortunately for myself, I think during the final mixdown, I think during the final assembly of tunes, my engineer, that is the engineer I use on everything, Fred Breitberg, who I've used on everything for six years and who I wouldn't do anything without, I took him to LA for Johnny Otis and to New Orleans for professor Lonchair - he was just splicing together some songs, and I said, 'I'm never going to do anything like this again, this has been incredibly money- and time-consuming, and exhausting, and frustrating... but if I did, I wonder what musicians I'd get?' And I got a piece of paper and I made a list, and the list was twenty-seven bands. And right after that I started thinking about volumes four five and six - unfortunately volumes four five and six didn't do well. We didn't get nearly the media response. Whereas one two and three were an announcement that the blues are alive and well in Chicago, four five and six it was old news. And I got hardly any reviews, not everyone liked them, I mean do you remember BU saying 'This boring series grinds on.'? I'm sorry, fellas, that I can't find some other scratchy Chance out-takes to re-issue!

That's what you need, those guys are purists.

Well, it isn't just a matter of being a purist. You have to consider the implications of reviews. And you have to realise that when a record is getting reviewed in only... well, our records get reviewed in a lot of pop-type publications, as well as daily newspapers and things like that. But where a record is getting reviewed in BU or Living Blues, that may control a couple of thousand sales. And unless you think something is outrageously bad, it's helpful to mention the strong points as well as the weak points. I'm not saying that people should be hypocrites, and recommend

a record that they don't feel's recommendable. But critics get into a position, and I know, because I wrote for Downbeat a long time ago, when I was working for Delmark, where they're thinking, 'Well, my opinion's really important.' Not that my opinion may be important to the artists' career or sales, but people really want to read what 'I' have to say. You know, gets carried away, over the actual response of the music. And you also feel you have to have a strong opinion. Instead of saying, 'Well, it's not a bad record, but it didn't do much for me personally. You might like it.' You know, you feel like you've got to say 'This stinks.' The only record that I can remember giving a really bad review to in Living Blues, back when I was reviewing for them, was a Sam Lay record on Blue Thumb, that I thought was just dreadful. And still do. I just think **that bad BU review affected sales.** It's interesting that the session they liked best was the one that, of all the sessions on 4,5, and 6, was the one I considered perhaps the least musically interesting, and that's the **Andrew Brown** session. A good, solid, workmanlike session that I don't feel is more than that. Maybe because it was a hard session to do, because we were using horns live rather than overdubbed, and the horn players weren't that good, and we had to figure out how to keep them in tune while getting the best out of Andrew, without doing so many takes that we lost... I don't like doing a lot of takes, because you lose the feeling, and I hate doing overdubbing, because you lose the feeling, it becomes mechanical. It was a real mechanical session, so maybe I can't hear it as anything but what it was. **I hate listening to my records.** Oh yeah, because all I can think about is how they were done, it takes me years to be able to listen and say that's good or that's bad.

Can you listen to the **Hound Dog Taylors** now with some enjoyment? One of the reasons it took me so long to issue the remaining Hound Dog material was I couldn't handle listening to it emotionally, at all. And when I finally came to it, I discovered that I was enjoying the hell out of myself. And recently my ex-wife located an extremely bad video-tape of Hound Dog in performance, and we rented a videotape player to look at it. And we both sat and laughed and cried, and she was with me in the last period of time when I was managing Hound Dog. **Hound Dog's wedding present to us was shooting Brewer Phillips.** He was really mad at me for getting married.

Did he really?

He certainly did, three times. **In the leg.** When Hound Dog died, he was involved in an Attempted Murder case. Oh yeah. Shot **Brewer Phillips** the week I released **Koko's** album, and the week I got married. He was probably also mad at me because **Sam Seals** played my wedding reception, but that was because of routing, because Sam was in Kentucky, and I got married in Cincinnati. **He was my nearest band!** Anyway, I discovered that I was really enjoying Hound Dog. None of my employees had ever seen Hound Dog, and so to show them Hound Dog, they began to enjoy Hound Dog, and they began to understand a whole bunch of things. And everybody was really happy with my liner notes for the last album, because they thought I had really caught some of it, and I was too. And now, yeah, I really enjoy Hound Dog, and

listen quite a lot. And I listen to the Bir Walter record late at night.

Yes, I really like that one. That last track...

Yeah, that's a special one. Let me think about my special tracks for a minute. Give me my catalogue, and I'll tell you what I like. I don't know if you're interested. Off that first record, the first Hound Dog, She's Gone, and Wild About you Baby. Trouble in Mind, of course. Now That I'm Down, the last tune on the Son Seals album. Look for what I like as being the last track of side two, very often. See Me In The Evening, from Natural Boogie; quite a lot from the first Fenton Album, but I don't know whether one more than another - I like Directly From My Heart To you a lot; That's Why I'm Crying, from the first Koko album. You'll notice I'm a very obvious Magic Sam fan, I've covered almost his entire repertoire. Son did a Magic Sam tune, All your love, on his first album, Koko did one on her first, Eddie Shaw did one on his session... I'm trying to think, it seems like there's at least one more I've done... Freddie's Blues, from Hound Dog's live album. A couple of things from the Midnight Son album, particularly Don't Bother Me, and Telephone Angel. The Blind John Davis album was a licensed album, my first one, so harder to pick because I didn't produce; As The Years Go Passing By from Fenton. Hmm. Off the Koko Earthshaker record there's quite a lot that I like. I suppose I like I'm a Woman, because it was fun to do.

Does Koko write her own stuff?

She wrote those lyrics. I helped a little.

Valerie Wellington does a lot of Koko stuff.

I know, a little too much. I'm encouraging Valerie to get into her post-Koko period.

Last night I saw her sing something for the first time without growling. A sort of ballad, very nice.

When I saw Valerie, she was in her Aretha Franklin period, and I liked that period a lot better. I have high hopes for Valerie.

Yes, she's impressive.

Yes, she is. In many respects. Er, a whole bunch of stuff off the live Son album. Cold Cold Feeling from Albert; In the Dark, from the Lonnie album, a slow blues. From Professor Longhair, almost the whole record. Brick, from Albert's horns record - my horns period - I'm not Tired, from the Son Seals Chicago Fire record; Eyeballin', from Lonnie's Turn On The Night record. I'd rather go Blind, of course, which I think is one of the best thing I've ever done. The live Albert album is different, it's a live album, I can't really think about it. That album is very funny, because it's the art of intercutting. There are an incredible number of cuts on that record. Cold Cuts, the last tune, which I think is 5½ or 6 minutes, is a 14 minute performance, with over 40 intercuts.

You take pieces out?

Yeah, some of them huge, two or three minutes.

Grief. I didn't know you could do that.

Oh, yeah, my engineer's a master of that, and we do a great deal of that. Many of Albert's songs are two or three different takes. Every Beat of my Heart, from the

Johnny Otis record. It happened like that(snap). Completely spontaneous. Two takes ... one take, one take. The LCBs - Serves Me Right To Suffer, from Jimmy Johnson, your turn to cry; My baby's so ugly, from Eddie Shaw; the whole Left hand Frank session; Woman in Trouble by Carey; Two Headed Man by Lonnie; Have you ever loved a woman by Lurrie. I kind of like the whole AC Reed session; Naptown by Lovie Lee. Drowning in My Own Tears by Lacy Gibson, which I think may be the best version of that song ever recorded, and Jerry Wexler, who produced both the Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin versions, thinks mine is the best. Yeah. Called me up to tell me. I Wouldn'ta did what I did if I hadn'ta bin High, by Detroit Junior. And what do I like from the new Hound Dog, especially? (Tape Ends, new tape begins amid hilarity, Albert Collins having called from LA)

[Let me finish with the theory. Blues musicians wear their emotions very close to the surface. They have to, because they're conveying real direct, emotional music, and they have to be able to call on their emotions. If you know anything about Stanislavsky, method acting, the idea is that you have emotional recall. You may not presently feel that your baby has left you, but at some time in your life your baby has left you, and when you sing it, you should be able to dredge up those emotions and really feel them, not fake-feel them. Well the result is that blues musicians have to be very emotional people, to be good. And unfortunately, if their emotions are close to the surface during performance, they are by necessity close to the surface at other times. So what you get is a lot of very emotionally-self-indulgent people, who expect a lot of things that regular people don't expect, out of life, in terms of the way they're treated, and also in terms of what they can get away with, and to a certain extent in that respect, can be very childish people. So the gift of the ability to be able to perform blues in a convincing manner, is counteracted by an absence, a void, which can show up in many ways in emotional immaturity. All kinds of irresponsibility, a lot of self-destructive behaviour, obviously a lot of alcoholism, I deal with that all the time - although not with nearly as many musicians now as I used to. So the musicians, while saying they're not Gods Who Walk the Earth, they have a special talent, and a special whole in themselves. And whatever - that which is given is also taken away. It sounds very biblical, but I do believe that, that there's a real balance there.]

Yeah. Nice little theory.

Well, it makes a lot of sense, and that's one of the reasons why, the more self-conscious people become, the more artistic they become, the less good blues musicians they are. When they start thinking of them selves, or seeing themselves through other peoples' eyes. I remember Son Seals saying, somebody asked him at an interview, 'Have you experienced everything you wrote about?' And he said no, but I've known people who have experienced everything I've written about, and I understand their feelings, I know their feelings. I know that blues keeps me from going crazy. Quite literally keeps me from going crazy. For example, one time I remember, on a particularly icy day I was moving my car out here, I was hurrying, and I skidded my car into another parked car, and just bashed the fender up real

badly. And I was just so furious, you know, I was ready to scream and beat up my wife and things, and I came in, and grabbed an Elmore James record and threw it on the turntable, and stood between the speakers, which were in the same location they are now, and I cranked it up as loud as I could, and stood there. And I listened to the same song five or six times over, and I was OK. Wild About You Baby, which is one of my favourite songs. Overall, Elmore James is my favourite musician, ever, in any kind of music. I listen to Elmore James more than I listen to anyone else. And although I've been listening to a lot of Irma Thomas just recently, my usual soother is Something Inside of me Just won't let me be. That's what I listen to when I'm feeling really abandoned by women. A frequent occurrence. I also think that my being an intensely emotional, and emotionally self-indulgent person, helps me deal with the musicians. Although they look to me for a stabilising force. A number of bands travel with road management. So we road-manage them with written directions. Now we're talking about people that are not necessarily as skilled at word-skills as they are at music skills, who have little formal education. We prepare what we call running sheets, with each day broken down. Most musicians get a contract from their manager, and that's it, and the road manager picks the road, and makes the motel reservations. We do road management by paper. We make all the motel reservations, we make detailed directions on how to get from one place to the other, what highways to take, what turns to take, you know, turn left at the red barn, go up three quarters of a mile... Loading times, sound-check times, set times. We arrange all of the media interviews. Before every gig, we do publicity, except some Chicago gigs. If Koko plays the Iron Horse Coffee House in North Hampton, Massachusetts, which seats 85 people, on a Sunday night. We put out press releases to every newspaper within 60 miles, all of the commercial, college, and listener-supported radio stations; we arrange, in advance, telephone interviews for her; we send out press kits and photos so there will be stories about her; we send records to anybody we conceivably think might play them, as well as posters and display materials to the club, so they can advertise the gig well in advance, and so that people coming in for the three weeks previous to the gig to hear other musicians, will see a Koko poster, and have a bio of her that they can read, that's professionally presented, and press quotes. We now have half-way decent videos of all our artists, and if clubs have a videoscreen like On Broadway has, we can provide a videotape for them to show in advance - or a thirty-second video-clip for the local news. We try to orchestrate the entire daily schedule of the bands, you know - you have to get in by this time, because you have an interview scheduled immediately following the sound-check. When you arrive, telephone this radio station and do a five-minute telephone interview over the air. And that's the way we avoid the necessities of dealing with rock radio, as well as avoid the necessity for a personal manager, which the bands can't afford - a road manager, which are paid by the bands, not the management. We co-ordinate every date that the artists do. If the agency books them, we clear them; they can't book a date without our

approval. In addition we tell the agent where we want the artist to be. 'We want Koko to be working Texas, Louisiana the first ten days of May, and we want you to call these clubs, in addition to everyone else you know. These are clubs we know.' Or we plot out where we want artists to be. I do almost as detailed running sheets for European tours, even though there are road managers provided. Every date, every hotel, what means of transportation - so if the road manager fucks up, the musicians have an opportunity to make the gig. The publicist function is about forty percent of what we do here, and it's building careers without radio. How much American radio have you listened to?

Hardly any.

About twelve years ago there was a phenomenon known as progressive rock radio. Does this mean something to you? OK. A lot of stations who had an FM signal they weren't using got talked into, by the station-owner's son, or somebody, to let them go on the air and play album cuts. Rock album cuts. And attempt to hustle advertising from the local waterbed store, and other local counter-cultural operations. This was gravy for the local radio stations. Most of the DJs were working for next to nothing, a lot of them were friends. They all programmed their own shows, often they'd bring their own records, if they wanted to have an interview they'd have an interview. There was almost no national sponsorship. And this grew from nothing to, at one point Chicago had three what were called free-form progressive rock stations, as well as some shows that were purchase-time on other stations, where people would say 'Hey you're not doing anything late at night, I'll give you fifty bucks an hour and I'll go out and find my own sponsors.' For a while this type of radio was very open to blues, jazz, not so much country, but a lot of folk, and even some other ethnic musics. It was a very short period of time, and that was the time Alligator got started in. So when I had that first Hound Dog Taylor record, and was travelling through the country with a car full of records, I was walking into stations, and meeting each jock individually as they went on the air, saying, 'Hi, I'm from Chicago, and I'm a blues fan, and I started a record company and produced a record by my favourite band. Here it is.' Instead of saying, oh you'll have to clear that with the music director, or programme director, the 'Consultant' which is now what's going on. The jocks would say something like, 'Oh wow, far out. Heavy.' And I remember the first time I was in Detroit, with the first record, and somebody played the whole record on his show. Just said, 'Oh, yeah, I like blues.' And put it on, and played it. The whole LP. And then I would go to distributors with airplay. Now, if I'm really really lucky, I have a dinosaur progressive rocker like WXRT here in Chicago, that sponsored that Blues Deluxe album - which wouldn't do that now, by the way. They were in a different mode at that time - that plays a little blues in their format, partly because they're a Chicago station, that has a blues show, one hour, one night a week - which now is playing more purist blues, but at one time was playing fifty percent Johnny Winter and ZZ Top and Allman Brothers, which may in fact have been better in terms of what they needed to introduce real

blues to their listenership, and - c'mon, brain - and that's the only commercial white programmers programming blues in this city. There's a couple of college stations have blues shows. There's a blues show on our board of Education station, extremely late at night, and there's Purvis Spann, your all-day, all-night blues man. Who I hope you've listened to. But WXRT is a dinosaur, and there are literally six stations now in the country that are programming loosely in a commercial, album rock format. And the remainder are formatted dtations playing chart hits, familiar album cuts from the late sixties, early seventies, which is the bane of the whole record industry right now - how many old cuts are getting played, singles or albums - and usually are consulted by Abrams in Atlanta, Joel Sebastian, or the Doubleday consultants, who are picking cuts for them. So that, for example, the fact that somebody's popular in your city has nothing to do with whether your consultant suggests, or allows, you to play this. Since the consultants are costing the stations \$100,000 a year, obviously the station owner is eager that the consultants advice be followed. And of course this killed the opportunity for blues getting played. Besides, one of the things that's happened, and it's happened quite clearly, is progressive rock, or AOR - album-oriented rock - radio, has become lily-white. The only acceptable artists are oldies artists, you can play an old Motown cut, that's fine, and Hendrix. Nobody allowed, not even Stevie Wonder

REALLY?

I mean, these are the people that want to rape your sister. Stevie's at a disadvantage because he's blind, but he might stumble across her in the dark. And it's the most lily-white form of radio, of any type of radio. I mean, country stations will play Charley Pride and that other guy I can't think of the name of, Stoney Edwards? And there are a couple of other black country artists. And certainly Charley Pride is acceptable, he's black, he's not fooling anyone. What are now called Adult Contemporary stations, but were previously called Middle of the Road stations, will play Diana Ross or Dionne Warwick, or Smokey, and I think I saw someone, OC Smith was back, or a Brook Benton type of a singer, you know, a black balladeer, or Johnny Mathis, who isn't very black but is the right colour. The point is they'll go by what's in the grooves, not so much by a colour line. True, the artist may not be a black audience-identified artist, but when I walk into a station, and they look at a cover, and without even breaking the shrink-wrap, say 'We can't play this record, our audience can't identify with this kind of music.' What they're saying is, 'We think our audience doesn't want to hear niggers. And we'll make sure that they don't know what niggers sound like by not playing any.' And that's been really the case, and it's the only format of radio in which that is the case. And it's funny, here I am, born July 1947, the centre of the baby boom, and here are these programmers who are all of my generation, a few a little younger. The younger ones are actually, in certain ways, more open. A few of the weirdos on the West Coast will play a Rick James record, or something else by a black artist. You know, Rick James sold two million albums in New York, with no white airplay. And a lot of them to white people. Because what I'm finding now, white

people in Chicago are listening to black radio stations, and I see that elsewhere. Maybe we're going full circle, and this will be like the South on 1954, white people listening to black music. But we were the generation that was going to end racism. And here the media of our generation is in fact more racist than the overtly more racist media of the previous generation. They might say, 'These are inferior people, but they've got natural rhythm and they make good records.'

And now we just don't play the records.

Right. We still espouse that we are racially... we don't have any black jocks, of course. We rarely have any black people on our staff in any capacity, except if we're forced to by equal opportunity laws. All of which are going to be destroyed anyway. And we just ignore the existence of black people, as much as is possible. A few years ago, when disco was going on, one of the local jocks, Steve , who's a very funny jock on an album rock station, WLS-FM, who has a personality following, if you know what I mean. People don't listen to him because of the music he plays, they listen to him because he cuts down anyone and everyone, and he really is hilarious. He was on an anti-disco rampage, in which he told people during a White Sox baseball game to bring their disco records, and before the game, with the co-operation of the people who ran the ball team, they blew up disco records in the outfield. I hated disco, because I thought it was reducing black music to mechanical pap. But I have to believe that one of the reasons that happened is that disco had such a strong identification with being black music, and that there was a real anti-black undercurrent in the anti-disco thing. Because actually I'm hearing a great number of disco beats now on rock tunes. All kinds of new-wave bands are using a very mechanical disco beat, or even drum synthesizers. And all kinds of other things that have that very inhuman kind of a rhythm approach, in which all beats are equal. Whereas that music was unacceptable as black music. Music which is literally pale imitation is getting airplay, on white stations. That doesn't make it good music to me. It makes it funny that even bad black music is getting ripped off. I used to be the last person to call racism. Bob Koester used to say that that white people are all inherently racist, and it's all just a matter of some admit it and others don't. I'd say no, no, things are really changing. It's only really been the last four years that I've really had to admit the existence of racism in this medium. The fact that the white and black blues audiences are so distinct from each other. You're aware of that, I presume. Purvis Spann produced a show at a place called the Pavilion about three weeks ago. He promoted it himself, which is technically illegal, he used his own radio station, bought spots for himself, you know, without reporting them, did spots that were more than a minute long. It's definitely a conflict of interest, it's just that the FCC doesn't care about black radio. Federal Communications Commission. They don't care about violations, and frankly in Purvis' case I don't care either. He's trying to raise money to go 24 hours with the AM station, bless his heart. He had 13 acts, some of them using a house band, some of them local, like Cicero Blake, Bobby Jones; let me see, who else. Little Johnny Taylor, as distinct from regular-size Johnny Taylor, Syl Johnson, who's extremely good, Little Milton, Tyrone Davis,

who, believe it or not, is generally considered to be a blues singer; Latimore, who was excellent, really knocked me out. Are you familiar with him at all? Benny Latimore? Had three or four albums on TK, Glades actually. I don't know the label he's on now. There's some of these records you definitely ought to go seek out. Sort of a blues balladeer, if you like. ZZ Hill as a headliner. I have a hard time calling capacities, but I would say there were eight thousand people there, at \$13 a head. And it was easy for me to tell you how many white people were there. Two. Myself and the woman I was with. No, that's not true, Lonnie's white piano player, and a few other business oriented people, and I saw four white people in the audience. White people didn't know that show was going on. They might not have liked it, because everyone was only on twelve or fifteen minutes, except ZZ Hill.

When was that?

It was right after ChicagoFest, I think the 13 or 14 of August. And it was natural that Lonnie and Koko were booked, because they're my artists with the most black visibility. And of course we all made a deal with Spann, they didn't work for Spann for the same money they'd really work in concert. But Spann plays their records, you know, and one hand washes the other. And I don't see the white audience and the black audience ever really coming together. This is the only place I know of, in Chicago, where it even begins to happen. And still, BB King can play an all-black gig, or an all-white gig, and often will come to the city and play Dallas International on 7744 S Ceriano and draw 2000 black people, and then go out and play the Millrun Theatre and draw 2000 white people.

Bobby Bland's playing somewhere way south this week. I thought I'd try and go, see a real black blues gig.

When I started going to the South Side, white people were really a rarity. I would see some at Theresa's. Almost never at Pepper's, which is right down the street from where the Checkerboard is now. And never at Florence's. I might have been the first white guy to walk into Florence's. Or Porter's, or very rarely at Queen Bee's, and never on the West Side, never ever on the West Side. The white people I'd see, I knew. It was the same six people that would show up - Wes Race, Dick Shurman, Jim O'Neal, a few other people, Rick Crayer, who's now playing rhythm guitar with Muddy, you know. Get the idea? The real hard core. And there was no tourist trade in the blues at all. And there was no blues in the North Side, it was unheard of. Shortly after that Bob Reidy was the guy who began bringing blues to the North Side. He had a rock band that he made more and more into a blues band, and he began making contacts and bringing up guest soloists - (?), John Littlejohn, and Johnny Young, and Carey then for a while.

This is when?

Late '70, early '71. (Magic Slim telephones. Tape stops.)

I like Slim, but frankly, he's getting a little bit over-recorded. He did an album for Rooster that isn't out yet, and he's done another live album for that little Candy Apple label out in Lincoln. And you know, we haven't sold that many records. I like Slim's music a lot, but it would give me more satisfaction to record

somebody new.

Who have you got in mind these days?

Well frankly, what I'd really like to do, is another series of anthologies. Because I'm hearing a lot of people who I feel could give me four or five real good songs, who are not ready for a full LP. Or who don't fascinate me enough for a full LP. Let me see, who was on my last list... Valerie was one of them, Byther Smith, Michael Coleman, John Watkins, maybe John Primer, Maestro, Koko's lead player; I'm trying to think, I keep thinking of them at the oddest moments. Maybe Smokey Smothers, who is I think capable of some good stuff.

It would be nice if you did him.

Well, somebody a little older. I don't know, I've got my list of names kicking around somewhere, and that appeals to me more than going back... I will be doing another album with Albert this year. And it's fun doing albums with artists I've worked with before, but it's more fun having the challenge of somebody new. And I feel like, when I do somebody new, it expands the image of the label as well. You know, I have a roster now: 4 Son Seals albums, 2 Lonnie Brooks albums, 3 Koko Taylor albums, and 3 Albert Collins albums, as well as 4 Hound Dog albums. Well, I've got a lot of albums, I'm probably the most active blues label in the world right now; but people perceive that as repeating myself. And because of the relatively small number of issues on the label, compared to a pop label, to a certain extent there's truth there. I mean when Columbia issues another album by a Columbia contract artist, nobody thinks, 'Well, Columbia's just spinning their wheels.' Of the younger artists, as you know I'm very taken with Lurrie, I'm very taken with Robert Cray out on the West Coast, I think he's excellent, out of Portland Oregon, who learned a lot from Albert. I'm fascinated by Sugar Blue in his own weird fashion.

I'd like to see him and Lurrie get together.

Yeah. They could have a drugs and alcohol contest.

Lurrie's pretty straight these days, I think.

Oh. That's different from last time I saw him. I hope so. Lurrie's just had a very hard time growing up. And not what you would call great examples around him, for how to be a mature and responsible grown-up person.

Well, I think he's OK now.

Well, I think Billy's a very good influence on him. What I'd like to see with Billy is - I think he's a real talented guy, and also can be an extremely charismatic live performer. But - he's still groping for his own style, especially vocally. I wish that I could find Billy's voice for him. I found Carey's voice for him, though he doesn't always remember. I mean Carey sang much differently for me than he had sung before.

He sounds like Sonny Boy Williamson on some of his earlier stuff.

To me he always sounded like he wanted to be Junior Wells. In fact I asked him, and he did want to be Junior Wells, he was his favourite singer. And of course Junior is influenced by Sonny Boy, that quaver, you know. Carey sang much better for me than he did for other people. When Little Walter was around, he revolutionised

harmonica by playing jazz horn parts, on the harmonica. Since Little Walter, every other harmonica player who came down the line has played variations of Little Walter music, which is about as interesting as if Little Walter had done carbon copies of original Sonny Boy, and Little Walter would have had just as much impact. He could have been John Lee Williamson junior. Have you seen Youngblood, BB Jones, the BB King clone? He's amazing, I mean he studies in the mirror. No, seriously, he wears BB suits, he's got an exact BB guitar; if BB's got a natural, he's got a natural, if BB's got a process, he's got a process. And it is an amazing imitation. I mean, he's really a good singer and player too. It's just that he's utterly caught up in it. And he has said something like, 'When BB retires, I'll take his place.' As though people wouldn't notice. And indeed they might not. His name is Alvin Nichols, and I like him because he saved my life once, on the West Side, back in 1970, in the Sportsman's Lounge. When I first came to Chicago, it was only a couple of years after Martin Luther King got killed, and it was during a time when... back in the mid-sixties, black people really thought something was going to change in this country, and there was going to be a lot more opportunity and middle-class living, and integrated neighbourhoods. And starting around the time of the death of Martin Luther King, they realised that there was a little change, and that was about all that was going to happen. And there was an increasing sense of frustration, that continued through into the early seventies, followed by what I see as a long term sense of resignation - which may, in fact, ultimately be better, in that what came out of that was maybe a truer form of black pride. Certainly the Roots thing was a very very good book for the blues, and the whole black community's relationship with itself. Rather than freedom or opportunity being a handout, now it's something that it's conceivable that you're going to get, but you've really got to bust your balls to do so. That's maybe a patronising thing to say, I'll have to think about it. Anyway. In the early seventies, when I was in the South Side and the West Side, I would run into a lot more racial hostility than I've run into ... 74, or 73, was about the last time I really ran into anything where I got picked on for being white. I've had some incidents since then, a musician who I won't name, who I'm a big fan of musically, tried to stab me on a street corner last year, fairly seriously. And a musician who I would have thought might want to try to stab me grabbed him from behind.

Yes, I've heard about this, I know who you mean.

Oh. Well, I wouldn't embarrass the musician, who was sort of flipped out at that particular time, and who has some mental problems, by mentioning the name. But it was an interesting situation. I'll be glad to tell you the dialogue, or the monologue, actually. I'll paraphrase. The musician admitted that yes, I'd recorded the musician; yes, I had paid the musician for the session exactly what I'd said I would; yes, I had paid the musician's royalties; yes, although I had not agreed to do so, I had assisted the musician in getting other work and getting other opportunities; but: I hadn't done as much for him as I had for some of those other niggers. And that's when the knife came out. If I hadn't done anything he would

have been my best friend! But I only made him a few thousand dollars instead of hundreds of thousands of dollars, so he's my enemy! Anyway, it was pretty scary. This particular time, somebody was just trying to kill a honkey, showing off, signifying, broke a bottle. And I had that happen once to me at a club called the One Step Beyond, which almost was the one step beyond, seeing Byther Smith and Left Handed Arthur together, on a Mediocrity Double Bill. But Morris Pejoe was stumbling in, as versus sitting in - I guess he's dead now, it's bad to speak ill of the dead, but Morris was funny, because you know a musician will come up and say, 'I really appreciate you inviting me to come up and sit in, I don't consider myself the greatest in the world, but I'll try to do my best for you, and I'll play what I know, and I hope you enjoy it.' Morris would say, 'I'm not really a very good guitar player,' and then he'd go on to prove it. It was like, 'Oh yeah, I see what you mean.' Plus he had this sort of dour attitude, like if he had played badly with feeling, or spirit, you could at least say, 'Well he's having a good time! I may not be, but he is.' He wasn't having a good time. He always looked like he had just come out of his mother's funeral. And he played like he'd buried his left hand in the casket with her. Anyway. Somebody tried to kill me that night. Interceding doesn't always mean you've got to pull out your gun and jump between Mr Bruce and the offending party and stop him; sometimes it just means saying something like, 'Hey, cool out, he's OK.' And at the One Step Beyond, I remember somebody saying, 'This isn't Mississippi.' Which is interesting because the fact that the guy was willing to go after me was an indication that indeed it wasn't Mississippi! But the message was, you may have been offended by white people down south, but, you know... And so anyway, Youngblood, as he was called then, got this guy to cool out, which I appreciated, because I was in the back of the club and there was no back door. I didn't no how much longer I could hold out barricading myself in the man's room.]

I've never had any problems.

It's very unlikely, Frankly, I think sitting in a club on 43rd Street is a lot safer than walking down North Halsted.

Yeah. Most of my hassles have been on the street, between CTA and the club.

The fact that you're getting to clubs on public transport is amazing to me.

Well, I don't go all that often. I don't go to the West Side.

Someone told me it was worse.

I don't think the West Side's any worse, frankly. I think people on the South Side are afraid of the West Side, and people on the West Side are afraid of the South Side. The West Side is a little poorer.

Well, it's a newer ghetto.

Yeah. I'm not quite sure what that means. Sounds sort of fresh. You know, somebody came by last week to drop broken glass.

Yeah. All our garbage is new.

Right. The city just released those rats. Came by and dug the pot holes. Only weeks ago this was a respectable neighbourhood!

Yes, under Mayor Byrne's Ghetto Reclamation Scheme.

Exactly. Probably that would be a big seller. Mayor Byrne's Ghetto Revival Scheme.

Another project with you in mind. Mayor Byrne. That woman kills me.

Well, it was just like that with mayor Daley. Even more so. Mayor Daley's name was on everything. It was hilarious. If you drive to O'Hare, there's a big sign saying Welcome to O'Hare Airport, you know. Gateway to Chicago. And the name of the Mayor. The day after the last election, Michael Bilandic's name was down and Jane Byrne's name was up. 24 hours.

That must have been on the agenda.

Yes. It's such a funny city. I didn't grow up here, so I see it. My father was in government, not in politics, in government, and in good government, local city management government; and my mother was league of women voters, and all very good government, and very much oriented toward real government for the people. And when I first came to Chicago and saw what was going on, I just found it totally unbelievable. Say for example you have an old garage behind your house, and it's falling down, and you really don't think it can be repaired. So you pay somebody to tear down your garage, and you've got this huge pile of lumber and broken-up concrete and things. And you want the city to haul it away. In most cities you would call up your city sanitation office, and you would say I've got an extra load of garbage, would you come by. And they'll say sure, and they'll schedule it, and they'll do it, it's a city service, you pay taxes for it. Here, you go down the street and you see your precinct captain, Lenny. He lives three doors down. And Lenny calls up the sanitation people. And then, having that city service that you pay taxes for, done, becomes a personal favour. And people forget that they're paying taxes for this. You understand? It all becomes a patronage system, straight down the line. Lenny works in the parks department - except I've never seen Lenny go to work.

I read 'Boss.' It gives some insight into how a place like this is run. One big happy family, with everyone on the payroll.

Wonderful book. The thing that I find most interesting about Chicago in that regard is the pride with which Chicago wears its corruption. When I moved here the City Assessor had just been found guilty of giving tax breaks on home assessments, to his family, you know, his relatives, and his neighbours, and as well as his close personal friends. And right after that he was re-elected on an overwhelming majority, the largest of his career. And the logic was, 'If I was city assessor, I'd give tax breaks to my neighbours and friends and relatives.' Everybody has friends and relatives working for the city. Everybody. Except me. Actually Bob Levis, Lonnie's old rhythm guitar player, is getting a job with the city. He's not getting it by taking a civil service exam; he's friendly with his alderman.