

Randy Demmon

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(Transcript edited/amended by Randy Demmon)

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MMS - Here we are Musicians of the Midnight Sun in Ottawa on the beautiful Holiday Inn. On 99 Joseph Seer Street in Ottawa and it's September the 27th and I'm joined today by *Randy Demmon*. Thanks for doing this Randy. If I could kick this off, what were your early years as a young musician like? If you could tell me about that.

RD - Prior to Yellowknife you mean?

MMS - Yes. Yeah, just where you grew up and what kind of music...

RD - So I think I was in my first band when I was 10 or 11 years old. The name of the band was "Sputniks". It was a saxophone, a piano and a drummer. I played music all the way through school but wasn't allowed to play in the school band (even though I could play saxophone) because I was playing in a rock and roll band. The music teacher said I had to make a choice; either I could play rock and roll or I could be in the music program; but I couldn't be in both. So I chose to play in rock and roll bands.

In my final year of school, he reneged one time. I would sneak into the band room every once in a while to play piano but if he caught me, he'd throw me out. And I remember, I probably was just about ready to graduate from grade twelve and he caught me playing the piano. When I saw him come through the door and I thought, uh oh, I'm in big trouble here. He surprised me by saying "no, no, you can stay." And I thought, well this is a total reversal from being persona non grata even though I'm just a kid. He then said, "yeah, you're probably one of the few kids who is going to end up being a musician anyway." I didn't really get it but at least it was okay to play the piano in the school music room that one time. It was kind of a strange time. It was at the time when "The Beatles" were popular so we went to see "The Beatles" in Vancouver and then I went to UBC where I studied music.

MS - You have to tell me about seeing the Beatles.

RD - Seeing "The Beatles" was amazing. I was playing with a band in Kelowna called "The Shadracks". It was a wonderful experience. Good band. A fella named *Craig McCaw* was the guitar player and he ended up being in a band called "The Poppy Family". He was the sitar player in "The Poppy Family." *Craig McCaw* was this very studious, serious young guy who ended up hooking up with *Susan Pesklevits* and *Terry Jacks*. "The Poppy Family" made some recordings and they were fairly popular. They had some hits and that kind of thing. We got "The Shadracks" together and we drove to Vancouver to see "The Beatles". It just so happened that the singer in the

band was a fellow name *Rick Mussalem*, who had a very prominent nose and he looked almost identical to *Ringo Starr*.

When we got to Vancouver, we got together with a guy named *John Tanner* who had moved from Kelowna where he was a DJ on the local radio station. He moved to Vancouver and started working for a guy named *Red Robinson* in Vancouver on CFUN radio and became known as *Jolly John Tanner*. *Jolly John Tanner* was about six foot seven and had weak ankles but he had a heck of a nice radio voice.

“The Beatles” were supposed to stay at the Hotel Georgia, right downtown in Vancouver. The word got out so there were thousands and thousands of screaming young girls gathered on the street, just waiting to see a glimpse of “The Beatles” at the Hotel Georgia. *Red Robinson* and the people at CFUN radio, just as a publicity stunt, decided to dress *Rick Mussalem* up to look like *Ringo Starr*. They wanted to see what would happen if they drove him down the street in front of the Hotel Georgia in the midst of this mob. The car was a model of a Mercury or a Monarch back in the 60s in which the rear window went down at an inward slant and it could be opened. It was a very unusual car and the back window was open. So they went ahead with their plan. There was a driver along with *Red Robinson*, *Jolly John Tanner* and *Rick Mussalem*, who was not *Ringo Starr* but he fooled a lot of people. Somebody saw him and screamed “*it’s Ringo*” and it was just like watching a gigantic vacuum sucking young girls toward the car. They were all over it, 3 or 4 bodies thick. There were young ladies crawling in through the back window trying to get at him, take a piece of clothing. According to *Rick*, it was a terrifying experience.

The music at “The Beatles” concert was pretty good. It was held at Empire Stadium. The warm up band was “*Bill Black’s Combo*.” They were well known and had a distinctive sound and style featuring a single tenor sax. They played tunes like “White Silver Sands”, usually to a shuffle beat. And the warm up singer was *Jackie Deshannon*. *Jackie Deshannon* was this blonde, knockout whose big hit was “Put a Little Love in Your Heart”. She was very sexy and kind of got the audience into a frenzy.

Now the stadium was full and then there was this area on the grass which was fairly full. When “The Beatles” came on however, the stadium emptied, everybody went down onto the ground and you could hardly see the band just because of the dust. You could sort of hear what they were playing but it was pandemonium. It was also a great experience. So that was “The Beatles.” *Rick Mussalem* got to go back stage with *Red Robinson* to meet “The Beatles” and tell them the Hotel Georgia story.

MMS - Beatlemania, like personified.

RD - Yes, it was. It was incredible. So then I moved to Vancouver to go to UBC and I saw some great shows in Vancouver. I saw *Cannonball Adderley* live at a little place called “Isy’s”. It was *Cannonball*, his brother *Nat Adderley* and *Joe Zawinul* was the piano player. The group title was the “*Cannonball Adderley Quintet*”. I forget who the drummer was but I think *Sam Jones* was the bass player.

MMS - And you’re still close to '65?

RD - That would be in the early sixties I guess. Yeah and who else? I saw *Charlie Mingus* there, in Vancouver. Saw a lot of good things anyway. So I went to UBC and UBC was run by an interesting fellow named *Wilton Marcus* and *Wilton Marcus* had been a film writer in Hollywood. He was a composer and he knew all kinds of guys. He knew *Igor Stravinsky* and *Morton Feldman* and *Aaron Copland*, all these famous guys he knew personally. In fact, *Igor Stravinsky* came to UBC because *Wilton Marcus* was the head of the faculty there.

So it was an interesting musical experience learning at UBC in those days as it was in the stages of the faculty getting started. They had an electronics lab before anybody, you know, it was at the time of (*Vladimir*) *Ussachevsky* and *Iannis Xenakis* and (*Pierre*) *Boulez*, this kind of thing. So it was a kind of a modern approach but they had some good traditional teaching as well.

I studied oboe with *Warren Stannard* and composition with a woman named *Jean Coulthard Adams*. I don't know if you've heard of her. I think now she's known as *Jean Coulthard*. She's passed on by now but I studied composition with her.

MMS - The environment there when you're going and you talked about the electronics lab and that was probably very cutting edge in the early sixties.

RD - That was cutting edge.

MMS - The program itself you mentioned a couple of people but as far as like other professors, instructors, musicians.

RD - Well, the instructors, a fellow named *Cortland Hultberg*, he was the guy who had the electronics lab and he also had a small chamber choir and his chamber choir became, after he finished his tenure there, it became something called "Phoenix". And "The Phoenix Choir" out of Vancouver, I think at one point about 15 years ago, something like that, in competition, was named the world's best choir. It was a remarkable choir and the "UBC Chamber Singers" were a remarkable choir.

Now, I had sung since I was a kid but I never took any vocal training. Actually I did. I took two lessons with a fellow named *Robert Morris* who wanted to turn me into a lyric tenor and I wasn't ready for that, so I withdrew. But in my last year in the music faculty, *Cortland Hultberg* was looking for a tenor and of course there were a lot of very good tenors there but he asked me to sing because a lot of the music that *Stravinsky* wrote, *Elliot Carter* wrote, *Morton Feldman*, people who were writing kind of avant garde chamber music, choral music, they were often looking for the sound of the ordinary man. Like if we did a *Bach* cantata, they'd use a trained tenor but there were a lot of parts. "*Stravinsky Mass*" for example, there's a tenor solo which you almost need to have somebody, an untrained voice to sing the part so that's what he was looking for. He wanted somebody who could sing in tune and had a voice with a certain quality. I have that certain quality. I could sing high and that was it.

MMS - So very much rooted in the classical genre there.

RD - I was in a classical genre at UBC although I played gigs outside as well.

MMS - But within UBC, that was...

RD - It was classical.

MMS - And choral music and the electronics lab.

RD - Yeah that's right.

MMS - If you wanted to go to the devil's music, you had to...

RD - Well, at that point it was no longer the devil's music. I mean, we met some nice people. *Craig (McCaw)* and I, when we were with "The Shadracks" used to go to these things, usually in the interior BC, sometimes on the coast, called "the battle of the bands", right. There were, seven or eight bands playing but the band which always won was a band from Vancouver called "Little Daddy and The Bachelors". The group had their own club on Davie Street. It was called the "Elegant Parlour". *Tommy Chong*, the actor guy from "Cheech and Chong" was the guitar player. The singer was a guy named *Tom Milton* and he was, I think he was in the movie "Animal House". You know the one where there's this black band playing behind a cage to protect them from the beer bottles being hurled at the musicians ... I think that was, at least in part, "Daddy and the Bachelors". If not, it was a pretty good imitation. There were a lot of good bands in Vancouver, "Grumpy and the Green Men", "The Collectors" which grew into "Chilliwack", *Sheri Ulrich* with "The Hometown Band" and so on.

So anyway, I was studying oboe and I was getting better at it. I auditioned for "The National Youth Orchestra" was accepted and I went to Toronto, my first trip east, and played oboe. I was a pretty good player but I was looking for a job where I would play principal oboe. Principal oboe and second oboe are almost like two different instruments. The principal gets all the nice melodies and doesn't have to play as much tuttie material while the second oboe ends up doubling the second clarinet or whatever. I actually wanted to just continue studying but I was married, had two children and a bit of debt so I took an education degree thinking I would try teaching. Well, I had an opportunity to practice my teaching skills in teacher practice sessions and I knew almost right from the get go it wasn't my cup of tea and that I didn't want to do that. I wasn't sure what I was going to do to make a living but I was just going to stay in Vancouver, stay active and hopefully get a job playing oboe.

I was wandering around with some friends at UBC and they we went to a job fair where I met this guy from Yellowknife. His name was *Bernard Gillie*. There were no music programs or teachers in the Northwest Territories at the time. *Gillie* was the director of education for the whole territories and he's looking for somebody to start music programs in the territories. We talked and he convinced me to take on the job. He said, "you should come up to Yellowknife and start things going. We need somebody like you." I wasn't too excited about the idea but then he started talking about the money. I'm trying to remember but it seems to me that to teach in Vancouver beginning teachers only made about 7 or 8,000 dollars. In Yellowknife you were making 11 or 12 thousand plus there was all kinds of extras like a northern allowance and housing. *Bernard Gillie* was a smart old codger and he said, "you know, I think we can manage a signing bonus if you take on the job in Yellowknife." So I got a two thousand dollar signing bonus which I mean, that was

going to eliminate my student debt and all I had to do was drive my family to Yellowknife. But he was smart. He gave me a thousand dollars when I signed and said “you get the other thousand when you get to Yellowknife”. I had just returned from youth orchestra. I’d been away for over a month and my youngest child, a one year old, didn’t recognize me. It was a confusing situation and while I wanted to stay in the city and just see what happens, I also felt obliged to create a more stable environment for my family. I decided to try the Yellowknife job for a year so we headed north. It was almost September when we drove up there and I had an old car. It was a '57 Chevrolet that had a rope holding down the hood and the trunk. I built a wooden box to hold all of our possessions and put a tarpaulin over it to protect the contents. What I didn't realize before I headed across the Mackenzie Highway is that the door seals were shot.

When we got onto the gravel, the generator in my car broke down and we had to make a long stop in Hay River. We spent 3 days on the Mackenzie Highway and by the time we got to Yellowknife there was more dust inside the car than outside. We looked like those Filipino Bushman, you know, the ones that have mud all over the body. To add to our misery, our apartment wasn't ready to be moved into so we stayed in the Yellowknife above the bar where the bands played well into the night. It was hard on all of us and I was not impressed with Yellowknife. I can remember thinking, God, the trees are so small and scruffy, everything looks rough, there's so much dust. I felt that moving from Vancouver which was so lush and green was a big mistake. It was too late to turn back, however, so we stuck it out.

My contract was divided between three school boards, I guess to share the cost of my salary. So I taught at Sir John Franklin and also at the St. Pat's parochial school, the Elementary school, the one that went to grade 8 at the time. Sir John I believe, started grade nine. Before I had left Vancouver, I was allowed to go and purchase things that I thought I would need and billed it all to the territorial government. Some of the things I bought were a little unusual. Because of my interest in electronic music, I bought a synthesizer, 10 turntables for a listening room which permitted students to listen to recordings being played on any of the turntables. The “Mini Moog” and “Arp” synthesizers were just being developed so the synth had no keyboard and involved simple wave generation, pulse and modulation of sound waves which would be considered primitive today. When I was studying at UBC I went to the listening library every day and introduced myself to a wide range of music. It was a very rewarding experience, one I wanted to provide for the students. I also bought dozens of albums for the students to listen to in a variety of styles from classical music to jazz, pop, blues and folk. Before leaving Vancouver I also arranged for musical instruments to be rented. Those purchases ended up being well chosen as did a complete set of “*Carl Orf*” instruments I purchased for the Elementary school. The “*Orf*” instruments consist of a bunch of xylophone, marimba type instruments, some metal, some wood, beautifully crafted to produce a beautiful sound. Some of the large marimbas in the low register were about four feet long. There were enough instruments to accommodate a class of about 20 along with incidental percussion instruments for another 10 students if required. The “*Carl Orf*” system is based on pentatonics. The bars on a traditional keyboard are removed so only a pentatonic scale remains. The same approach is often used with wind chimes. Kids could play any note and it would blend in harmony with any other note. Students are initially taught to play in time and once they are able to do that, the melodic component is introduced. Eventually you fill in the missing notes and they kids would be able to play all of the notes. The instruments were a bit pricey but it offers a lovely systematic method to learn about music and I bought a whole set of them. The parents of the older

students at the Elementary School were gung ho to start a band program for their children. The same held true for the parochial school and Sir John Franklin School. Parents from the south wanted the same music opportunities available in southern schools. The push was also on for a community band program. I started a wind program in all three schools at the same time. It worked fairly well in the Elementary School and St. Pats, but not so well at Sir John Franklin. No one had taken into consideration that at least half the school population at Sir John was made up of native students from the settlements. Kids from Coppermine, (Kugluktuk), Loucheux kids from Arctic Red River (Tsiigehtchic) and so on ... they were all thrown together and lived in Akaitcho Hall. Virtually none of them had the slightest bit of knowledge about a clarinet or trombone nor were interested in learning how to play a wind instrument. While wind instruments were totally foreign to them, they knew about guitars and loved music. Against the advice of school administrators I ordered 25 Yamaha guitars. I think. They were classical guitars with nylon strings which were easy to play. I'm not a good guitar player by any stretch of the imagination but could play well enough to get the students started. Kids around the age of the grade 9 students were often shy but they love music and singing. Those classes were always full. There was no formal curriculum, so I would just write out the chords and lyrics for popular songs by (*Gordon*) *Lightfoot*, *Joni Mitchell* and others, make copies and we would learn the songs together. I encouraged the students to choose the material and that was it. The addition of the guitar made the music program accessible to everyone.

The listening program was taken advantage of by all kinds of students, even those who weren't taking music. Students came in when they had a class break, before school, and at noon. There were always kids in there listening to music. The band program was a bit tougher to get going because I had to split my time between three schools, trying to get the "*Carl Orff*" system off the ground and make an effort to appease members of the local community who wanted a community band. I didn't have time or energy to meet the demands so at the end of the first year I gave up St. Pats. They were supposed to get a replacement but their program never got off the ground. The wind program at the elementary school provided the students for what would eventually become a fairly active program at Sir John.

MMS - The students that you had ... like you were talking about the guitar classes and there was probably lots of students from the Akaitcho Hall coming in. And just even thinking about you describing the listening labs and the headphones and stuff like that, chances are you probably blew a few of their minds that way just as far as they never would have been exposed to some of the music that you were bringing in for them.

RD - Yeah. I don't want to overstate it but at that time, probably due to their age, the Akaitcho students weren't overly communicative. At the same time, they were there, they were sharp, knew what they wanted and about what was going on. I was kind of just a facilitator who provided a space and opportunity but yes, I'd say they knew how to take advantage of the opportunity to get what they wanted.

You know after I left Yellowknife I went to Ottawa to join the RCMP band. The main reason I came to Ottawa is that I thought I'd be closer to audition opportunities on the oboe. I had no intention of staying with the RCMP band. I was going to stay a year or so and if I didn't find a job playing oboe in an orchestra I wanted to go to Spain and play in a piano bar. Things don't always

work out in the way you think they're going to because as it worked out, being in the band ended up being a very good thing. One of the great opportunities it provided was a chance to travel all over the country and internationally. One of the places we got to visit, the one that I found most satisfying, was in the north. There aren't very many names on a map in any province or in the Territories we didn't visit.

MMS - Wow.

RD - Better yet, the band was actually made up of 2 bands and I was the leader of the smaller group called "Bison". Well, that small band was portable enough that we could go anywhere. The RCMP had several twin otters which we had access to. As you know, they can land and take off from just about anywhere, regardless of whether there's a runway so we landed on a road in the middle of a settlement or on a river bank. It was a terrific experience which allowed us to visit and play in little places like Repulse, Grise Fiord, Artic Bay, Resolute, Onion Lake, Green Lake, Cape Good Hope ... just about every spot on the map that had a name attached to it.

MMS - Yeah.

RD - So, I often went to settlements and on quite a few occasions I'd meet slightly older versions of those students from Akaitcho that I met in Yellowknife. They didn't call me *Mr. Demmon*, they called me *Demmons* with an S. So, 'Hey *Demmons*, how are you?' They were always friendly and had memories of those guitar classes even though they were adults by the time I crossed their paths. I've even had them come up to me in Ottawa to say hello. Usually they're very accomplished, knowledgeable and representing some aspect of their community in meetings. As you listen to them talk, you know you're talking to a person who's capable and on the ball. One particular person I remember was *Alexis Pameok*. He was from Baker Lake, and was a better guitar player than the other students. He also sang with confidence and liked to perform. I saw him a few times in Ottawa and in Baker Lake.

MMS - Do you remember the names of some of the people that were calling for those opportunities for their kids or for a community orchestras or choirs that you're talking about? Who were the other, who were your allies I guess or peers at that time, people with the same kind of vision?

RD - I don't know if they were necessarily allies because I think the expectations, their expectations, were that I was going to be a band guy. I know how to conduct and run a band or an orchestra but I prefer other ensembles to concert bands. When *Roy Menagh* took over after I left, he would have met their expectations because he was a guy in that mold. He was a band guy. Right? And that's what he did. So he would know how to set up a program. I wasn't so interested in that, you know? I mean, I played oboe and I could play the other instruments so I could certainly teach it. I did my best and did have a community Band. *Colin Alexander*, the editor of "News of The North" played trombone, *Albert Eggenberger* played Baritone horn and perhaps tuba, several of my students played clarinet or trumpet and so on. They met on Saturday mornings but attendance wasn't consistent and I lost interest. As I'm thinking about who played in the group I remember that one of my best friends in Yellowknife, an architect named *Hans Barford*, played double bass in the community band. *Warren Ward*, a student from the elementary school was quite a good trumpet player. His Dad was *Bob Ward*, who ended up being a politician. Before he was a

politician, he and a fellow named *Pat Deman* had the Coca-Cola outlet and distribution for the north. In fact, when *Bob Ward* quit the Coke Company he tried to get me to buy his share. And if I'd been smart, I would have heeded his advice.

I had many students like *Warren Ward*, *John Sigvaldason* whose father *Jack* started the "Yellowknifer", *Greg Stirling* and others. I wasn't a veteran teacher but seemed to have good rapport with a lot of these young, smart people who liked music, had their own ideas and just needed encouragement. That was kind of my approach to teaching music rather than having a set routine as in "this is what we do". It certainly wasn't overly structured but nor would I say it was a shambles. I think the approach was productive. There was learning taking place and there was good music being produced. Likely to the chagrin of some, however, developing a band program per se, was never really a priority. That would have been a bit frustrating for the principal, especially at Sir John, who wanted something to show for his money. In fairness, conditions didn't really lend themselves to achieving that goal. There was never a proper music room (only a classroom), there was no place in town to perform and little interest and support from within the school system. Add to that the fact that a band program would have meant ignoring the interests of half the student population, the native half. For those who had an interest in studying music, what was provided was an opportunity to learn and progress in a very flexible music program. The school superintendent for Yellowknife was a fellow named *Norm McPherson*. I've never heard of anyone who didn't just adore *Norm McPherson*. He was a very bright fellow, very laconic in his habits and uniquely supportive of my approach. His daughter played flute and his son played guitar and sang. *Norm* made me feel pretty good about the way things were going. Since I was the first music teacher, not only in Yellowknife but in the NWT, I became involved in helping to come up with a way to expand the teaching of music across the territories. It should be acknowledged that while I may have been the first music teacher per se, there were others who incorporated music into their regular classes or taught piano privately. *Marg Suddaby*, for example, taught music before I arrived in Yellowknife.

MMS - She was my music teacher that way

RD - What's that?

MMS - I still remember her classes, she was hilarious.

RD - Great. There were others and some who followed. By the time I left, when *Roy Menagh*, just after *Roy Menagh* came in, I think we had a teacher in Hay River, in Inuvik, one in what was then Frobisher, which is now ...

MMS - Iqaluit.

RD - Iqaluit, thank you. We had one somewhere else ... Maybe (Fort) Smith, there was somebody, I'm not sure. But at any rate, there were the beginnings. I think there was a total of five music teachers. There was an attempt to have a little convention in Yellowknife to discuss and coordinate programs. That was in the third year I was there. The idea was to promote and encourage the hiring of more music teachers. One of the reasons it was difficult to get music teachers to come to the Northwest Territories is that there were so many jobs available elsewhere. I could have had ten

jobs in Vancouver when I finished university. It's cyclical. Sometimes there are no teaching jobs available and then other times, lots. There was also a shortage of qualified capable teachers to that's why *Bernard Gillie* was out doing his best to drum up some business.

So that was the music program. I feel like we had some success and likely made it easier for the next music teachers to operate. The students must have enjoyed the experience because they still call me. You know *John Sigvaldason*, who I know as *Thor*. I love the name *Thor*, I don't know why he changed it. *John* played clarinet in my school band, switched to guitar and I think eventually he switched to bass. I think he went to "Grant MacEwan" (Community College) about the same time you did.

MMS - Yeah. Well he was the reason why I went. He was the-

RD - Oh, was he.

MMS - He was the trailblazer. Then my friend *Norm Glowach* went and then I went and there's just a trail, a trail of hopefuls behind me.

RD - Yeah, well there were great teachers at Grant McEwan. *Charlie Austin*, I knew *Charlie Austin*. I remember he was a good player.

MMS - No *Charlie* was one of my favorite teachers-

RD - *Tommy Banks*. *Tommy Banks* ... All you need in any community is one *Tommy Banks*. In Toronto, they had guys like *Mo Kauffman* and *Rob McConnell*. In Winnipeg it's *Ron Paley*. You just need that central guy and Edmonton, my God ... they had television shows with international exposure because of *Tommy Banks*! *Moe Marshall*, what a great guitarist. He used to play at the "Old Bailey" with *Wes Henderson* a bassist and singer who used to play with "Little Daddy and the Bachelors" in Vancouver. They were a remarkable duo. *Marshall* designed and made his own guitars.

Anyway, so that was kind of the background in Yellowknife. Initially it did not look very appealing to me at all. I really wasn't all that happy being there but I worked by buns off and I was still dreaming about a career as an oboist. I'd spend at least a couple hours a day on my own horn and was always looking for an audition I could afford to get to. In the first year, within about three months of arriving in Yellowknife, my oboe cracked due to the dryness. I had to send it away to Toronto to have it repaired and of course a three-week repair job ended up taking three months ... Things were not going well when I first got there.

At the same time, I also started playing in the bars. It was just a kind of a diversion, in a sense. I enjoyed that aspect of it and I met some fine people and amazing musicians. I fondly remember, a young lady named *Jane Clancy*, who was a kind of a folk singer. She played guitar very well for a young girl. She was probably 15 or 16. I think she was in high school when I met her. She could really sing and sounded more like *Judy Collins* than *Judy Collins*.

Since I said that I initially didn't like being in Yellowknife I'd also like to say that my view of the place changed. In the first year, around about February, I was getting desperate to make money to leave. That's partly why I started playing in the bands on the weekends. Due to some unwise investments in the stock market I was so broke at the end of June that I couldn't even afford to go south for the summer. To say I was disappointed would be an understatement. There was nothing to do but make the best of it so I played a lot tennis and bought a canoe. It was a beautifully designed and built old chestnut canoe, made in New Brunswick. I don't know how it ended up in Yellowknife but I was happy to have it. Being too poor to go anywhere ended up being a bit of a gift. I got to spend my summer in Yellowknife and got to know it and the lakes and rivers around it pretty well. We went canoeing almost every day. My tennis game improved dramatically despite the black flies sucking the blood out of my body. You could play tennis at 10:00 at night. I started to make some friends and started enjoying Yellowknife. Many of the friends I made at that time are still my friends. There's something about that environment, which is ... it's extreme. When the sun is up, it's just there for a long time. When it's winter, it's winter for a long time. And so I think that that has a tendency of pushing, in kind of an empathetic way, pushing people together and it makes them closer. By the end of the first summer, I was hooked on Yellowknife.

MMS - Were you playing in the bands?

RD - I was playing in the bands, yeah I played with *Gary Tees*, and *John Tees* and their band. I forget what their band was called. I didn't play in "UM?". "UM?" folded at a certain point and I met *Kevin (Mackie)* and *Tom* at that time and then *Sandy Wilson* showed up. I met *Sandy* in the coffee shop of "The Yellowknife Inn". I asked him to sub for *Gary Tees*, the bass player in a group I was playing in. *Gary* wasn't able to play for some reason or another and the group was desperate. Someone told me about this great guitar player so I went to find him. I introduced myself to *Sandy* and asked him if he would fill in on bass for just this one night. He said, "No man, I don't play bass guitar." And I said, "Yeah, but you *could*, right?" And he said, "No, man." I mean, such a principled person. Just no flexibility. You know, I felt like kicking him. Fortunately this was only the first encounter of many over the years.

We became good friends and I would say that "Rainbow Valley", with *Tommy Hudson* on vocals, *Sandy (Wilson)* playing guitar, *Kelly Tippet* on drums on piano was one of the best I've ever played in. I had a "Fender Rhodes" piano with a wah-wah pedal on it. The sound was vicious. It was just ... give me all of the rhythm guitar tracks, some "AC/DC" combined and you might come close to the sound of that "Rhodes" piano. And *Tommy Hudson*, of course, was a wonderful singer. I saw *John Scofield* play at the "Ottawa Jazz Festival" last year and his keyboard player had a souped up "Rhodes" as his midi keyboard. He's the only other person I've ever seen using a wah-wah pedal on a "Rhodes".

Some great bands came to Yellowknife, many of them out of Edmonton. *Big Miller* was a regular but there were also some excellent pop groups who made the journey as well. One of the groups which came to town was from Bakersfield, California. A female singer was the front person for a trio all of whom were top notch players. The singer's husband was the drummer, *Charles Kirkpatrick* was the bassist and the keyboard player was an amazing pianist, named *Bert*. *Bert's* full name was *Burkely Kendrix*. I went to listen to them. It was obvious there was some tension in the group related to a problem with *Bert's* new "RMI" piano. At the time, the RMI was a cutting

edge keyboard having come out after the “(Fender) Rhodes” and “Wurlitzer” in vogue at that time. It was the first of the electric pianos to produce an almost authentic piano sound. *Bert* had misplaced the sustain pedal and without it the “RMI” was an incredibly clunky sounding piano. The singer was used to having an arpeggio lead her into virtually every song she sang. Instead, what she was getting was clunk, clunk, clunk etc. She was very upset which meant the drummer/band leader was also upset. There was really nothing *Bert* could do about the sound of the arpeggios without a sustain pedal. In hindsight he should have borrowed my “Rhodes”, but that isn’t what happened. He tried to explain to the singer that if she wanted an arpeggiated lead in, that’s what it was going to sound like. At the end of the evening *Bert* was fired. The drummer tried to hire me as a replacement but I was able to use the fact that I had a day job teaching school to avoid getting involved. I don’t know what happened with the band but I do know that *Bert Kendrix* got trapped in Yellowknife. He had no money and he stood out. His clothing was the kind of clothing one might wear on a gig in Bakersfield, California; striped sports jackets, shiny spat shoes, and a straw hat that was, well, dapper. *Bert* was a dapper guy who liked to drink and gamble. He stuck out a bit like a sore thumb. He talked incessantly and his voice had edge to it. It didn’t take long for him to annoy just about everyone in Yellowknife. When he drank he tended to develop the hiccups and they’d last for days. He would come to the dances when we were playing, get a little loaded and come up on stage where he’d take the microphone and say "*Randy Demmon* is the greatest piano player in Yellowknife."

Well, first of all, Yellowknife is a pretty small community. Second of all, it wasn't true. *Bert Kendrix* was the best piano player in Yellowknife by far. Regardless, he had no prospects and was in such a fix that it was impossible not to feel sorry for him. The weather was getting colder and colder and he was shivering and he just had no prospects. One time, I took him home for dinner. We had a nice meal and afterwards I played my favorite record for him. It was “*Howard Roberts* Is a Dirty Guitar Player.” There’s a version of “Watermelon Man” on the album which I like mainly because of the organ playing. It was loose and lanky and totally cool. *Howard Roberts'* guitar was always melodic and inventive.

As we were listening to it *Bert Kendrix* looked like he was in heaven. At a certain point he went over to the stereo, picked up the case for the album in his hand, put it in front of my face and pointed at the picture on the back. It featured a cartoonish drawing of a calliope to which someone had attached little black and white cut outs of the faces of the players in the group. It was difficult to make out the features of the musicians but the name of the keyboard player, the one who played the wonderful lines on this and also a later *Howard Roberts* album title “This is Howard Roberts, Color him Funky” was *Berkely Kendrix* that was the photo on the back cover. And the name of the keyboard player, this wonderful keyboard player on this ... that one and also “Color Him Funky” which is another *Howard Roberts* CD, was *Burkley Kendrix* aka *Bert*. The musician I had been admiring for so long was sitting in the room with me.

MMS - That's uncanny.

RD - The other Bakersfield player with a tie to Yellowknife is *Charles Kirkpatrick*, the bass player in the group. When he was in Yellowknife he met a woman named *Gladys* who managed the club the group played in and at the end of the group’s tour he paid her a visit. The two of them hit it off so he remained in Yellowknife and he became the bassist in “Rainbow Valley”.

Charles Kirkpatrick was the perfect band bassist. His playing was all about rhythm and he just laid it out. He just had such a great feel that it just permeated the entire band and put a smile on our faces.

His bass didn't have a lot of tone or sustain and came out more like a percussive "thwack". It was an old "Fender Precision" bass and I doubt that the strings had ever been replaced. Playing with *Charles* was pure pleasure. *Kelly Tippet*, the drummer in "Rainbow Valley" was extremely energetic and was an upper half player. *Charles* laid out the bottom on the bass, *Kelly* provided an onslaught of crisp upper end counter time in which he tuned right into what *Charles* was doing. *Charles* really was the core and foundation for the rest of the group to build on. *Sandy (Wilson)* the guitarist gets a warm wonderful sound out of his guitar. He doesn't play a lot of notes but the ones he plays all sound good. Playing piano is all about finding a place to support and complement and occasionally stimulate. The combination of the players, personalities and innate musicianship in the group resulted in a great shared experience. The sound, in that band, "Rainbow Valley", I think is as good as ... I mean, I've played in a lot of groups, with some amazing players but that band was just ... it just went right to your soul. It was so much fun. We played, I think we played five nights a week.

The icing on the cake came in the form of *Tom Hudson*. It didn't matter what song he was singing, he would make it sound great. *Tom* had his own voice, it was still him singing but he also that ability to sound like *JJ Cale*, or *David Bowie* or whoever he wanted to bring into the mix. *Tom Hudson* is a truly amazing singer. His personality was open and complicated at the same time. He wasn't gregarious or the kind of guy who would tell jokes on the stage but there was something about him that just warmed the audience right up. He'd start singing and the room would light up. I've had some, maybe half a dozen really superb musical experiences in my life. The ones you can say, for me, that's it. I would say that playing with that band was certainly a highlight because it was just so much fun. "The Yellowknife Inn", I don't know what it was like when you were there but I can still sort of see it, as I recall they had a black and white pattern on the wall ... it was, what's the word?

MMS - Garish?

RD - Yes. That's perfect. It was garish, just awful to look at. And the same people would be sitting at the same tables every night. You know? And the same things would happen ... that's happening, okay it's 10:13 or just whatever. But enjoyable. Nice to be a part of that. I really enjoyed that.

MMS - So you're telling us mostly in "The Yellowknife Inn" with "Rainbow Valley", then?

RD - Yeah. "Rainbow Valley" was such a great experience.

MMS - Even though *Gladys* and *Charles* were ... *Gladys* was managing "The Gallery". Did you guys ever play there?

RD - Did we? I did play at "The Gallery" and I'm trying to remember who it was with. I don't think we ever played there when I was with the group. I played there with *John Tees* and his quieter brother *Gary*. They were quite different, *Gary* would be in the background but *John* was just such

a happy go lucky guy with an infectious personality. He was happiest was when he had a guitar in his hand and was singing tunes. He just exuded that joy and you just had to buy into it. I really enjoyed playing with *John Tees*, he was a very nice player, singer and person. There were other bands and I'm just trying to think who was in them. At a certain point *Sandy* was in quite a few of them but I think initially I likely played more with *John Tees*.

MMS - Yep and you'd also be playing "The Legion" and-

RD - ""The Legion"" and "The Elks".

MMS - "The Legion" and "Elks" Halls.

RD - Yeah.

MMS - Yeah.

RD - They may have even had a routine where it would be "The Legion" one weekend and "The Elks" the next kind of idea. They were always full. And so many young people in Yellowknife of course.

MMS - Yeah, that time for sure.

RD - It was a nice mix of people, it was ... you might have a bunch of nurses there and a bunch of miners and a good mix of native, non-native community. People were happy and got along. Occasionally there were fights but usually they wouldn't be about anything of consequence. They would be about somebody just being stupid or having drunk too much.

MMS - Mm-hmm (affirmative).

RD - At 2 o'clock in the morning the "Kentucky Fried Chicken" on the same street as "The Legion" would still be open, right? So, people would line up outside, even in winter, because there was only room for about ... well, there was only room for six people inside, but there might be 20 inside, right?

I just thought of another band, a band which was in Yellowknife and I didn't have much to do with these guys but it was a band which played all the time and it was *Cyrenne*...

MMS - *Frenchy*.

RD - *Frenchy Cyrenne*.

MMS - *Frenchy Cyrenne*, yeah.

RD - Yeah. He was a guitar player.

MMS - Yep.

RD - And they played, not at “The Gold Range” but at the “The Gold Range”, not at “The Yellowknife Inn”. Is that correct? We called it the “Strange Range” I think.

MMS - Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

RD - Yeah.

MMS - And they would have played lots at “The Legion” and “The Elks”, and stuff like that. *Archie Loutitt*, the band was called “Northbound Freeway”.

RD - Right.

MMS - The guitar player, the one guitar player for a while there, quite a while and probably in the time that you were there, is a guy named *Archie Loutitt*.

RD - Right.

MMS - *Frenchy Cyrenne*, so those were two of the ... They were thick as thieves and then they had a bass player, drummer that would change different guys from the mines and stuff like that. Would, sort of, step in and-

RD - I never played with them. I did listen to them on occasion. I'd be walking by, and just poke my head in. It was at “The Gold Range”. It used to be “The Gold Range” was here and then there was a taxi cab right there kind of idea on that side street. Just around the corner. Yeah, no. I said, I think I might have said we played at “The Gold Range”. We never did. We played at “The Yellowknife Inn”. That's where we were playing.

MMS - Things kicked in there. You talk very fondly of *Hans Barford*, did you play music with him? Or was it just a-

RD - I did play a bit of music with him. I think he was probably a fairly well-trained bassist but he didn't swing. We did try to play piano-bass stuff. It was hard for him, pretty much everything had to be written out. He wasn't a faker. Faker being a good word, by the way.

MMS - Improvisational player.

RD - An improviser, yeah. He wasn't comfortable doing that. He was a very proud man, a wonderful person. Mostly what I remember about him is just that I got along very well with him. We talked about everything and anything. I think we just enjoyed each other's company and he was a terrific character. I loved his house. I loved the design of his house. He had a little Karmann Ghia, a little, I think it was ... was it beige? Or mustard colored Karmann Ghia?

MMS - Yeah.

RD - Yeah. There was a fella named *Stuart Duncan* and his wife *Huguette*. Oh, there was another musician as well, she was a singer. Actually, I played piano with her quite a bit. She was kind of

a standard singer. She had a beautiful voice. She was lovely, and they were neighbors of *Hans*, as well. So, that's what makes me think it was probably *Hans Barford* playing the bass there.

MMS - Yeah.

RD - And I can't remember who the drummer was. There were some drummers other than *Kevin (Mackie)* and *Kelly (Tippet)*. *JT (John Telgen)* wasn't there until just about the time I was leaving.

MMS -Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

RD - He showed up. I played with him and *John Tees*. And I think I played with him and *Sandy (Wilson)*, as well. He was a business drummer and he was a family man He had a wife and so on. He was more mature, I guess that's the word I was looking for. *JT* was a nice guy.

There must have been a lot of work there, come to think of it. And *Ted Wesley*, he was active and was a very good entertainer. There was two sisters who sang together who were students at Sir John. I don't remember their names but they sang a lot together, usually as a duo but they were also good backup singers. They backed *Ted Wesley* up. I remember playing a show where *Ted Wesley* sang and these girls sang harmony for him.

MMS - When you were playing with "Rainbow Valley" what was your book, what were the songs?

RD - "War". "Cisco Kid", is that "War"? (sings) *Cisco Kid was a friend of mine. J.J. Cale. Sandy (Wilson)* does a great job on *J.J. Cale*, it's just in his wheelhouse. Oh god, not much "Beatle" type stuff. *David Bowie* stuff, "Three Dog Night". Oh we did "Credence (Clearwater Revival)" songs as well *Tommy Hudson* he could do a replica of the Credence singer.

MMS - *John Fogerty*.

RD - Yeah, *Fogerty*, yeah. I think we did a "Doors" tune or two. I think we probably did ... what's the one, (sings) doo doo doo doo doo, doobie, doobie, doo.

MMS - "Riders On The Storm", "Riders On The Storm".

RD - Yeah, "Riders On The Storm". We played that. There's a nice little piano lick in it.

MMS - Oh, that would be great.

RD - I don't think we did any rock, like old '50's rock and roll stuff. I think it was mostly sort of relatively contemporary stuff. Everything we did was probably because of *Charles Kirkpatrick*. It wasn't just a matter of playing the changes or copying tunes, there was an added ingredient in everything we did which I think came from the way he played the bass.

MMS - Mm-hmm (affirmative).

RD - Or that feel. And it was so easy just to drop into it. The time was impeccable. I mean, you know how if you listen to really good jazz players, they're not worried about time. I mean, the time is a given, it's like you don't even think about it, it's just there, right? It's not something you have to play. I remember a concert in Ottawa about eight or nine years ago, *Jean-Luc Ponty* and *Bela Fleck* were coming to play for the jazz festival with *Stanley Clarke*. *Clarke* got stopped at the border and so he wasn't going to make the show, so they took two local players, good players. The bass player, is very technically competent player, likely the first call jazz player in town. The drummer was a young guy who had studied in "Berklee" I think. And they sat in with *Jean Luc Ponty* and *Bela Fleck*. Well, *Bela Fleck* and *Jean Luc Ponty* were extremely polite. What they did is they let these guys play time.

Here you've got these two guys, a drummer and a bass player doing what they usually do but not really contributing anything to that entity, the place where *Jean Luc Ponty* and *Bela (Fleck)* would find each other. There may have been some kind of common ground and they might have participated if they'd moved past just keeping time but they couldn't do that. They were "good" but they weren't at that level. If you and I were to be playing with them in a band we'd say, "this feels good you know, it's a good time" but *Ponty* and *Bela Fleck* didn't need time. At the end of the second piece they just very politely thanked the bassist and drummer. 'How about a big round of applause for ...' and, 'Thanks for joining us.' And the local guys got the message that it was time for them to leave. *Jean Luc Ponty* and *Bela Fleck* then as a duo and of course the quality of the product just went ... it just elevated.

I saw that with *Charles Mingus* in Vancouver. He was playing piano but he was a bassist. He played with a couple of local players who would have been top gun players in Vancouver. One of them wasn't *Don Thompson*, I can tell you that because he would have been happy with *Don Thompson*. *Mingus* wasn't as polite as *Bela Fleck*. He summarily dismissed the drummer and then the bassist as well. He then played solo and it was immediately better. Maybe the qualifier doesn't have to be worse or better maybe. Let's say it was different and for me, more enjoyable despite the momentary tension.

My view is that you could take ten people off the street. They can be of any color, creed or age and they'd get it. We've all got the same potential to understand this language of music and it's an abstract language but even if we can't speak it because we don't have any technique, no access to the right terms etc., we still understand it. People know. Those ten people, you bring them in, nine out of ten of them are going to know the difference between good and bad. So it's that quality and if you're going to speak that language, you kind of want to be impressed. I don't play during the jazz festival here. I'd rather go out and be blown away by people who are playing at a level that I can only wish I was playing at. I go to be impressed and I'm always impressed. I'm impressed by 17 year old kids from little towns in Russia who come and can play anything on the piano. Any tempo, any changes, doesn't matter. And sound like geniuses doing it so it's just like, where do they come from? Pluto?

MMS - Yeah, that's my line you know, with different people. It's like, 'well, no they're not from this planet, I'm sorry, they just got sort of parachuted in here, maybe it wasn't their first choice, but ... Again, a lot of different, those different levels and the perceptions ... like what you're talking about, even between maybe not so much good and bad but good and exceptional and stellar...

RD - And it doesn't have to be jazz either.

MMS - No, no.

RD - I heard *Alison Krauss* and "Union Station" this summer. Oh my god. If "Union Station" was a jazz funk band or a fusion band they would be "Weather Report". They're just playing at that level. And she sings, I mean if she's not an angel I don't know. Her and *Emmylou Harris*, I think they ... you know, it's just-

MMS - and again, that level is just ... Whether we appreciate it more or we just really appreciate it because we know how much talent that takes. But, also, how much really hard work and dedication and life-

RD - Dedication, I think, is the key. Yeah-

MMS - That's all they do, those guys.

RD - If you and I lived in New York City instead of living in Yellowknife and Ottawa, we would be different players, if that's what you were doing. But the thing is that, most of us, I know that in my case and I think in your case by the sound of things as well, music exists in a context. I love music. I've been playing music. I write music. I play it, I sing it, I eat it, I dream it. But at the same time, I have a family, you know. I have responsibilities and I want those, it's an important part of my life. And so, it exists in a context. You make choices and I can't say I've made the best choices. There's always better choices, I guess. But I think that, all in all, I'm okay with the way things have worked out. I would like to be able to play stride piano like *Dave McKenna*, or I wish my right hand was as fast as *Oscar (Peterson)* in his heyday, that kind of thing. But there are other things, too.

MMS - Different sort of levels of sacrifice, what those players sacrificed in normal quote, unquote living their life. Or their families did on their behalf because they recognize genius when it happens that way. And then, as well, to me and all through my life, it's always been these different degrees of sacrifice; especially with family and stuff like that, too. Sorry, I can't do this gig because this is a really important time for my daughter or this is a really important gig. I know you have to understand, it's always, it has to be like that because if it just stays in one place, well, something's gonna give, right?

RD - Yeah. But as a musician, I'm sure you're a developing musician. I feel like I am. Still, it gets better every day. And the thing is that at a certain point you get good enough so you feel, you actually feel comfortable enough saying "I am a musician", you know, or "I'm a composer". You can get there. Is what you're writing the greatest thing since *Bach* or *Beethoven*? Maybe some time you might get lucky or you might get good enough. But, I think as long as you're always developing at a personal level, not measuring yourself against someone else but measuring yourself against where you were. It's like a good golf shot. It looks impressive a little bit when you hit it out. If you get out there and you look at where you hit it from, then it's like, "Hey, this is not bad."

MMS - That's very good analogy there.

MMS - We're wrapping things up, this is cool, we'll just keep talking. I'll just keep taping because we just keep riffing and you never know what's going to happen.

RD - Yeah.

MMS - First of all, I guess, in light of your noble efforts up there in community and putting together band programs.

RD - Yeah.

MMS - People like myself and *John Sigvaldason*, and the different people were the recipients of what was, after you left and *Roy (Menagh)* came in and there were other people as well but within the community, as well, the community bands, a guy named *Albert Eggenberger* came in and I remember doing...

RD - *Eggenberger*. Okay. That was the fellow. Remember I said there was a fellow who was really promoting community band? It was *Mr Eggenberger*. And I believe he was a baritone horn player.

MMS - You're right. Yeah.

RD - Yeah. That's who it was. *Eggenberger*.

MMS - Yeah. Man, we'd be marching up and down Main Street all seasons, all events, whatever *Albert* could drag us out to do. And I'd be smacking up the side of a bass drum and freezing and stuff. But, hey! And there's *John Phillips Sousa*, man, until the cows come home, right? When you play that stuff you get I guess a certain appreciation for it and then you move on.

RD - Yeah.

MMS - But you did it. *Albert* was just a tour de force for so many years. So, really, it took another, probably, five years for it to sort of really reach its peak.

RD - Right.

MMS - In the late '70, and stuff like that. Mid to late '70s.

RD - Right.

MMS - Because, again, *John Sigvaldason* came through, my friend *Norm Glowach* came through shortly after that. I came through. So there's all of these very short, successive generations of players that came through that ... are still playing today or went on to do...

RD - Well, that's really interesting. It's really interesting because I would say that *Albert Eggenberger* was the one who really pushed me to start a community band. I don't know why he didn't just sort of do it himself. And I'm thinking that he probably took it, when I finished with it

and he probably did what he could have done in the beginning which is keep it going. I didn't realize he had done that. I was totally unaware.

MMS - Yeah. Oh, yeah. It's how I cut my teeth. Like I say, you went through the trenches with *Albert*. It was almost like a testing ground or a boot camp or something. And then he went on, and then it was the concert band. That was cool and then depending on what you played, then you got into the community stage band.

RD - More sophisticated stuff.

MMS - So, we had a stage band in high school, as well. We called it "Swinging Moods," and it was the kids playing all of those charts. Because there was filing cabinets full of music in the school there, that I'm not sure where the money came from but-

RD - Well, I think some of that music may have been purchased when I was there.

MMS - Yeah, exactly.

RD - I think I probably had a lot of music that I thought we could move toward but we didn't have enough time.

MMS - Just didn't quite get there.

RD - Well, that's good.

MMS - I just remembered-

RD - You know, you're saying some very reassuring things here because when I left Yellowknife that was it. This was a different life. So, I had no idea what was taking place there until afterwards. But it's good to know that, just because I'm someplace else, it wasn't all a total waste of time because it sounds like *Albert (Eggenberger)* kept things going in that department and *Roy (Menagh)* certainly did a great job of stabilizing and developing a program. So, that's kind of nice to know.

MMS - Yeah, you came in there at probably a pretty rough time and you were the prow of the boat...

RD - You know, this conversation has helped me remember some things. Which, I mentioned to you that I had designed a theater, a performance area and I said it was attached to the school. It was not. You know what it was? We had developed a plan. They had this big, it wasn't a quonset hut, it was kind of a, just a big, empty shell. That, I don't know. It might have been used to store road salt and who knows what it was for. But, that's what we decided we could turn into a theater. And that's what we used as the basis of design. It was not the school. The school, as you pointed out, did become, that wasn't my plan. At that time the current theatre was just the gym, that's all it was.

MMS - Yeah.

RD - There was a stage and they had performances there, as well. So, I had it wrong, but I just remembered that there was an empty field. Just as you were talking, I was just getting a picture of everything. I saw that, and "Oh! That's what we were going to turn into a theater." There was definitely a need.