

Oral Memoirs
of
Jesse Cutler (Part Two)

An Interview Conducted by

Geoffrey Cravero

February 23, 2024

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories
(RICHS)

University of Central Florida RICHS

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Geoffrey Cravero

Transcriber: Geoffrey Cravero

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

RICHES is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Jesse Cutler is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on February 23, 2024.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Jesse Cutler, a musician, composer, actor, producer, and entrepreneur. The interview was conducted by Geoffrey Cravero at Trevor Colbourn Hall at the University of Central Florida, in Orlando, Florida, on February 23rd, 2024. Some of the topics covered include getting starstruck meeting Marvin Gaye in the R&B Room of the Shrine Auditorium at the Grammy Awards, repackaging his album and forging a relationship with Quincy Jones, putting a band together and touring the West Coast, composing new songs, beginning a new romantic relationship, and developing Disco Diet, meeting Richard Simmons,

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creating and distributing the Eddie Rabbitt Mask, recording with Alice Cooper's and Aretha Franklin's Bands, forming his childhood band, The Young Executives, being managed by his father, performing for celebrities, signing to Mercury Records, charting a single, being on television, experiencing success and the breakup of the group, attending preparatory school in Queens and becoming involved in the Broadway musical *Godspell*, leaving *Godspell*, finding a manager and the importance of management and agency to a successful music career, repackaging his music and re-releasing it, moving to Winter Park, recording an album inspired by the city, getting re-married, recording a 12-album set of music inspired by astrology and marketing it through eclectic sound pallets, advice for aspiring entertainers, running a marketing company, writing his autobiography and finding a publisher, his closing remarks and future goals.

Jesse Cutler

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 2

Interviewed by Geoffrey Cravero
February 23, 2024
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00 **Getting starstruck meeting Marvin Gaye in the R&B Room of the Shrine Auditorium at the Grammy Awards**

Cutler Alright. I'm ready.

Cravero This is Geoffrey Cravero and I'm conducting the second part of an oral history with Jesse Cutler¹. The interview's being conducted in Trevor Colbourn Hall at the University of Central Florida on Friday, February 23rd, 2024.

Mr. Cutler, thank you for coming back and speaking with us again today. We left off with a story about meeting one of your heroes, Marvin Gaye². I believe you were just about to introduce yourself to him if you'd like to start off there.

Cutler Well, what happened was I was at the Shrine Auditorium³ in Los Angeles. And, uh, a friend of mine, who happened to be, uh, the mistress of Berry Gordy⁴, who had four children for him, seemed to be like the princess of the area. And she goes, "Who do you want to meet in the R&B Room?" And I went to her, "Anybody?" She goes, "Yeah. Anybody." "I'd love to meet Marvin Gaye." And she literally walked me over. I had, uh, two or three of my vinyl albums on United Artists⁵ under my arm. And she goes, "Marvin, this is Jesse Cutler. He's a recording artist, too." And I looked at him. And I went like that. I got starstruck. And that was the only time in my life that I ever – he was a lot taller than I thought, also. And, uh, I go, "Marvin, this is an honor. And I'd like to give you one of my albums." And I pulled a sleeve out, which on that particular album, I had top musicians. Lee Ritenour⁶, Jay Graydon⁷, people from Steely Dan⁸. I mean great backup singers. And, uh – and it was produced by Joe Renzetti⁹, who won

¹ Born Louis-Milo Gibaldi (August 28, 1951 –).

² Marvin Pentz Gaye Jr. (April 2, 1939 – April 1, 1984).

³ The Shrine Auditorium is located at 665 West Jefferson Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90007.

⁴ Berry Gordy III (November 28, 1929 –).

⁵ United Artists Records was an American record label founded by Max E. Youngstein of United Artists in 1957 to issue movie soundtracks. The label expanded into other genres.

⁶ Lee Mack Ritenour (January 11, 1952 –).

⁷ Jay Joseph Graydon (October 8, 1949 –).

⁸ Steely Dan is an American rock band formed in 1971 in New York.

⁹ Joe Renzetti (January 4, 1941 –).

the Oscar for *The Buddy Holly Story*¹⁰, which I happen to be in, uh, the last ten minutes. I'm in the band at the end. Uh [taps table], Marvin looked at me and I pulled a sleeve out and it read in the liner notes, "This album is dedicated to Lord God my Creator, to my mother and father, and to Marvin Gaye." And he looked at me. He goes, "You put me next to God and your parents?" I go, "Well, Marvin, you're Marvin [laughs]." And he hugged me.

And – and – and I could look around the room. I – it was Diana Ross¹¹, Lionel Richie¹², and, uh – and Smokey Robinson¹³. They all kind of giggled because I acted like [imitates himself] – like this. And, uh, my friend, who introduced us – and she goes, "You know you're blushing, Jesse." And, uh, you know. And he hugged me. And, uh, he said, "Would you autograph the album?" Marvin Gaye is asking me to autograph my album. I go, "absolutely." I pull my pen out. "To – to Marvin. My musical hero. Jesse Cutler. Blessings forever." And he looked at it. And he hugged me again [knocks table]. And I went like [imitates himself] [laughs]. That was a great, great moment.

And that was at the Grammy Awards¹⁴. And they – they had private – they had the Rock and Roll Room. And the R&B Room. And the Country Room. Said[sic] literally, if you were on the inside you could walk into those rooms and meet the biggest stars in every genre. So that was – that was a good – a good feeling.

0:03:12

Repackaging his album and forging a relationship with Quincy Jones

Cutler

And then – and – and by the way, I repackaged that album, which was released by United Artists¹⁵. Uh, I, uh, took possession of it. And I renamed it *Soul Wood*. And these are trees. The – these are guitars like trees growing in the forest. The forest of guitars. And, uh, I wrote on it, "Every guitar has a soul waiting to be mastered." Because, as you know, anyone who's listening or watching, when you play an instrument, if you're really serious about it, you want to master that instrument. You want to become the master. And eventually, what you'd probably like to do if you wanted a career in music is you have to create your own sound. And your own style. And your own melodies. That's the bottom line.

¹⁰ *The Buddy Holly Story* is a 1978 American biographical musical drama film depicting the life of rock and roll musician Buddy Holly.

¹¹ Diana Ross (March 26, 1944 –).

¹² Lionel Brockman Richie Jr. (June 20, 1949 –).

¹³ William Robinson Jr. (February 19, 1940 –).

¹⁴ The Grammy Awards are presented by the Recording Academy of the United States to recognize outstanding achievements in the music industry.

¹⁵ United Artists Records was an American record label founded by Max E. Youngstein of United Artists in 1957 to issue movie soundtracks. The label expanded into other genres.

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After that, uh – that great experience, I was lucky enough to meet Michael Jackson¹⁶ and Mar – and, uh, Barry White¹⁷. I lean personally – I don't know particularly why, but I lean towards R&B. And, uh, because I was still a rock musician, I played, you know, electric guitar. Uh, like my Stratocasters and my different more rock-oriented guitars [*knocks table*]. I always liked the sound of strings. Violins and cellos coming in to smooth it all out. Even though it had a rock sound on it.

So, I left New York when I was 22 years old. I had a contract with Fabergé¹⁸. They opened up Brut Records¹⁹. I was the first artist. It was me, Michael Franks²⁰ and Robert Klein²¹, the comedian. And so, I was seduced by Quincy Jones's²² daughter²³. "You belong in L.A. Not New York." Well, I – I challenge myself, eh, whether I made the right or wrong decision. But when I got out to California, living in Quincy Jones's house, not realizing Quincy was like at the top of the top level in the music business – in fact, he was the first Black executive in the music business for Mercury Records²⁴.

And it was at some time I was in China at a private party with my girlfriend at the time. I'm in Beijing and Quincy's there. And I walked over and put my arm around him. Gave him a little kiss. I go, "You know, you stole my music." He goes, "What are you talking about?" I go, "Well, you called up my contractor for my album for UA²⁵. And, uh, all the musicians on my album ended up on Michael's first solo album called..." Uh, uh, what's it called? The – I can't think right now. It was his first album. And the reason why was because I came from New York with a more New York rock sound, but an R&B twist to it. And that sound, he transferred on to Michael. Because he wanted Michael leaving the Jackson 5²⁶ to cross more into the white audience. So my sound was perfect for him. And I said to him, "You know, Q, you stole my music." He goes, "Oh. It took you that long to figure it out?" I go, "No. The contractor called me up and told me you called them up and got everybody off my album." I go, "Well, in a way it's a big compliment." But, you know, *Off the Wall*²⁷ was the title of the album. *Off the Wall*, that was Michael Jackson's first solo album.

¹⁶ Michael Joseph Jackson (August 29, 1958 – June 25, 2009).

¹⁷ Barry Eugene Carter (September 12, 1944 – Jul 4, 2003).

¹⁸ The House of Faberge was a jewelry firm founded in 1842 by Gustav Faberge in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

¹⁹ Faberge Cosmetics Company launched Brut Records in 1971 as an offshoot of Brut Productions, its film production company named after their line of men's toiletries and fragrances. The label closed in 1974.

²⁰ Michael Franks (September 18, 1944 –).

²¹ Robert Klein (February 8, 1942 –).

²² Quincy Delight Jones Jr. (March 14, 1933 –).

²³ Jolie Jones Levine (October 4, 1953 –).

²⁴ Mercury Records is an American record label owned by Universal Music Group that was founded in 1945.

²⁵ United Artists Records.

²⁶ The Jackson 5 was an American pop band founded in 1964.

²⁷ *Off the Wall* is the fifth studio album by Michael Jackson. It was produced by Quincy Jones and released in 1979.

So, when I met Michael at [*taps table*]—at some point, it was really amazing. Because my birthday is August 28th, and Michael's Jack—Michael Jackson's birthday is August 29th. So, in a way, I was absorbed into him through Quincy Jones. And because I was on that level, I got the privilege of meeting everybody. I mean anybody I wanted to meet. And I always leaned toward the Black artists. When Quincy met me, I had a big afro. And it kind of looked like, uh—it kind of looked like that. It was even bigger than that. And, uh, uh, when Quincy met me, he goes, "What's your blood?" I go, "What do you mean?" He goes, "What are you?" I go, "Well, I'm actually 100% Sicilian." He goes, "Sicilian? The Moors invaded Sicily from Africa. You Black." And he went like this with my hair and hugged me. And his daughter got all happy that he accepted me. And, uh, on the way out of his house, uh—he lived in Bel Air²⁸ at the time with Peggy Lipton²⁹ from the *Mod Squad*³⁰. She was the star. And I was thrill—I was a little starstruck meeting her. She was very pretty, quiet, and only four years older than me. So that means I was 22, she was 26, and Quincy was 40 at the time. Nonetheless, on the way out of his house, he goes—he whispers in my ear. He goes, "If you didn't have the blood, I'd kick your ass out of the house." I go, "But, Q. All your wives are white." He goes, "Well, that has nothing to do with it." [*laughs*].

So, I've had interesting experiences. I didn't marry his daughter. We were too young. I was 22, she was 21. It was a little too early.

0:08:51

Putting a band together and touring the West Coast

Cutler

And I stayed in LA for about a year. I actually put a great band together. And I ended up starring at the Whisky a Go Go³¹, the Roxy³², and all the top clubs. The Ice House.³³ And I—I toured up and down the West Coast. And, uh, I'll never forget the owner of one was a really, uh, popular big bar area with a stage. He came over to me. He goes, "You guys aren't a bar band. You're a—you're a—you're a concert act." I mean that was a compliment. He goes, "You could finish playing here, but you—you belong in a concert arena." I thought that was odd for a second I—that he said that to me. But that's what I kept doing.

0:09:35

Composing new songs, beginning a new romantic relationship, and developing Disco Diet

Cutler

After about a year and a half in LA, I went back to New York and went down to see my family down in Hollywood Beach, Florida. And every day, I went to the

²⁸ Bel Air is a residential neighborhood on the Westside of Los Angeles, California.

²⁹ Margaret Ann Lipton (August 30, 1946 – May 11, 2019).

³⁰ *The Mod Squad* was an American crime drama television series that aired on ABC from 1968 to 1973.

³¹ The Whisky a Go Go is located at 8901 Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood, California 90069.

³² The Roxy Theatre is located at 9009 West Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood, California 90069.

³³ The Ice House is located at 24 Mentor Avenue in Pasadena, California 91106.

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piano. I'm really a guitarist, but I can play pretty good. And I wrote maybe 30, 40 new songs. And I was motivated to go back to LA.

I go back on Valentine's Day in 1976, and I stop at a recording studio that I met the owner. And his wife said to me, "Uh, you like busty girls?" I go, "Well, who doesn't?" She gives me a phone number. I get to my friend's condo. I'm outside with two guitars, two suitcases, and a briefcase. And a girl comes walking down the block with two guys. And she goes, "Do you need any help?" Remember it's Valentine's Day. I go, "That would be nice." So, she takes my briefcase, the guys bring my luggage, and I take my guitars. And we get in the elevator. I go, "What's your name?" She goes, "Oh. Randi." I go, "That's funny." I pulled a slip of paper out that the girl from the studio gave me. I go, "What—what's your phone number? Is this your phone number?" It was a million to one shot that I get in an elevator a few miles away, and I'm holding the telephone number of the girl that the woman at the other studio told me I should meet. And there she was, standing in an elevator again. That was the best relationship I ever had. Within six, seven months uh, we live—we moved in together.

Uh, because of her—she introduced me to somebody. I got my contract with United Artists. And from that point on, I did that album, I launched music, uh—I launched, uh, Disco Diet. I had a concept. And this is where I'll lead with that. I saw in the late seventies that people were getting more into exercise and working out. And I came up with the idea of, uh, Disco Diet. Because disco was big at that time. The late seventies. It was called Disco Diet: Dance Yourself Slim. And I was—I sat in somebody's office for five days at the anteroom when you walk in the door. I sat there. I had breakfast, lunch, and dinner right there every day. And the owner, whose name was Cecile Barker³⁴, would walk by me with his accountant named Doug Dick. That was his name. With two checkbooks. And he'd be walking back and forth. And then, on a Friday, the fifth day, he looks at me. He goes, "You're not leaving. Are you?" I go, "I'll give you ten minutes."

I went into his office. And I said, "Mu—in the eighties, it's going to be all about exercise. Working out. Walking. You know? Running. Jogging. And I have a great idea." When I left his office, I walked out with a check for \$175,000. And that's from s—which means that whatever idea you have, you—if you pursue it and believe in it, it will attract and magnetize someone who will tune in with you. And you'll be fortunate enough to get the financing. So, bottom line, that was one project.

And we—I ended up hiring Young & Rubicam³⁵ in, uh—in, uh—in L.A. Their office in L.A. And we bought full-page ads in People Magazine, T.V. Guide, Diet and Exercise, Slimmer, Playboy, Playgirl. That's full [taps table] page [taps table]

³⁴ Cecile D. Barker (ca.1944 –) is an industry executive and record label owner.

³⁵ Young & Rubicam, now VMLY&R, is an advertising and marketing agency founded in 1923.

ads on [taps table] every newsstand [taps table] coast to [taps table] coast. And it was very successful. At my post office, when I went in to get it, we had bags full of orders. And we—we grossed millions of dollars.

0:13:57

Meeting Richard Simmons

Cutler

And during that time, a good friend of mine said, “You know, somebody wants to meet you.” I go, “What’s his name?” “Well, he’s—he’s got an exercise studio here. Um, he, uh, helps women in Beverly Hills. He’s got a salad bar.” His name was Richard Simmons.³⁶ Now, you might have heard of him. But, uh, he loved my Disco Diet, which was a beautiful package. A box that opened up like that. It had a 28-page diet and exercise booklet. It had three giant posters that you would put up on the wall and follow it. And—and, uh, the music. I hired Chaka Khan’s³⁷ band, Rufus.³⁸ And they were great. And a—and an arranger named Barry Fasman³⁹, who got famous doing Melissa Manchester⁴⁰ re—records. She got pretty big. Melissa Manchester. Anyway, [sings] “Don’t cry out loud. Don’t want to be...” That was [knocks the table] her big hit.

Anyway, he did a great job. And, uh, Richard Simmons begged me to talk to his manager. So, he picked my brain. And next thing you know, Richard Simmons became the guru. But it was really based on my Disco Diet at the time, and the amount of uh, exposure I had.

0:15:14

Creating and distributing the Eddie Rabbitt Mask

Cutler

So, uh, now, remember I’m with the girl that I met in the elevator. We—we’re living together now. I did [taps table] United Artists. I did [taps table], uh, Disco Diet. And then one day, I meet a woman who made masks. And I called her up. I saw a picture of these masks. I call her up. And I was lucky enough to call the manager up of, uh—of, uh, what’s his name? Eddie Rabbitt.⁴¹ He managed, uh, Dolly Parton⁴², Eddie Rabbitt, Leif Garrett.⁴³ And I convinced him to let me bring them to this girl to make what they call “death masks”. In other words, they put—they lied down, and they put this stuff on your face. And they literally lift up this mask. And they make a mold. And I go to a factory. And I made 10,000 Eddie Rabbitt masks the first time around. And we would sell them I—like t-shirts or hats. It was the first time masks—so you could be in the audience looking at your favorite star, wearing his mask. So that would be a trip.

³⁶ Milton Teagle “Richard” Simmons (July 12, 1948 – July 13, 2024).

³⁷ Yvette Marie Stevens (March 23, 1953 –).

³⁸ Rufus is an American funk band from Chicago, formed in 1968.

³⁹ Barry Fasman (October 9, 1946 –).

⁴⁰ Melissa Manchester (February 15, 1951 –).

⁴¹ Edward Thomas Rabbitt (November 27, 1941 – May 7, 1998).

⁴² Dolly Rebecca Parton (January 19, 1946 –).

⁴³ Leif Garrett (November 8, 1961 –).

I remember heading[sic] Barry, uh— Barry White.⁴⁴ I met him on a plane going from, uh, L.A. to New York. And his manager was sitting next to him. And his wife, Glodean⁴⁵. And, uh, uh, I told him—I showed him an Eddie Rabbitt mask. He goes, “You mean I’ll be sitting at the piano, [sings] Whoah. Doing that. And everybody out there was going to have my face?” “Well, it could happen. But you get a percentage of all the sales. Like t-shirts and, uh, merchandise.”

So, uh, we did that. And I was on my way to New York. I ended up on the front cover of the *New York Post* with— on Park Avenue, with a group of people wearing Eddie Rabbitt masks. And my arm and his arm. And me and Eddie Rabbitt were like this. And the next picture was Dolly Parton⁴⁶ at Studio 54⁴⁷ wearing an Eddie— walking with an Eddie Rabbitt mask. I have all that. I think you’ve seen it. Um, um, so that was kind of fun.

So, we did United Artists. Uh, that album was *Jesse Cutler*. Then *Music of*, um— Disco Diet. I called the mask company “Mask”. M-a-s-q dash A dash Raves. R-a-v-e-s. Masq-A-Raves. And [taps table] the, uh— and the distributor said, “You— you should go to like Thailand or, uh, the Philippines. They can manufacture it at like 20 cents apiece. Because I was paying probably around \$1.59 per mask. Says, “You can get it for like 15, 25 cents. But I was a little afraid to fly all the way to— at that time to the Philippines. Because I’d never been there talking to somebody in a factory. So, I let that go.

Well, then after that, uh, what else did I do?

0:18:07

Recording with Alice Cooper’s and Aretha Franklin’s Bands

Cutler

Oh. So, because I was always primarily a guitarist, songwriter and singer, I kept going at that. Oh. And then, I had my piano. And I came up with this idea called “Rockula”. R-o-c-k-u-l-a. The o—the other day, I’m looking at the word. It’s “Rock You L.A.”. But I didn’t think about that ‘til like years later. Rockula was about the, uh—the coming of like the Christ. The new spiritual image for the youth of the world. And it was a kind of a goth-rock kind of musical. And I actually got a—a—I went in the studio, and I hired, uh, uh, Alice Cooper’s⁴⁸ band. And they were great. Uh, not Alice Cooper, but his band. And, uh, the tracks came out great.

And as while I’m talking, you could hear everything that I’m saying on Spotify, Apple, Google, iHeart Media. Just about every music platform. You could hear all this very interesting music. I have to say, I was very blessed to be able to get the musicians on the level— top level. And that’s going from when I signed with

⁴⁴ Barry Eugene White (September 12, 1944 – July 4, 2003).

⁴⁵ Glodean Beverly White (born Glodean Beverly James) (October 16, 1946 –).

⁴⁶ Dolly Rebecca Parton (January 19, 1946 –).

⁴⁷ Studio 54 is a Broadway theater and former nightclub located at 254 West 54th Street in New York, New York.

⁴⁸ Vincent Damon Furnier (February 4, 1948 –).

Brut Records in New York. When I walked in, the studio band was Aretha Franklin's⁴⁹ band. It was Chuck Rainey⁵⁰, uh, on bass. And Cornell Dupree⁵¹ on guitar. And Bernard Purdie⁵², which was known as "Pretty" Purdie, on drums.

And I got the best compliment of my life. I was 21 years old. And when we were just going through the – the three singles that I made for Brut Records. The first one was called "Sympathy", and it would go [*imitates song*]. So, now we're rehearsing it. And "Pretty" Purdie comes over to me. He goes, "For a white boy, you got perfect timing." And, to me, that was the greatest compliment I ever had anywhere. Because all those Aretha Franklin hits, if you listen to the drums and the hits on the snare and the symbol and bass and everything and tom toms, it's "Pretty" Purdie. And he compli-[*knocks table*]-mented me.

0:20:40

Forming his childhood band, The Young Executives, being managed by his father, performing for celebrities, signing to Mercury Records, charting a single, being on television, experiencing success and the breakup of the group

Cutler

You know, going back for a moment, I was born in Brooklyn, New York. And I lived there 'til I was five or six years old. And, uh, I lived on Grove Street in Ridgewood. And I was a little boy. But when I watched TV, I got always excited seeing musical people on television. And because I pretty much was alone – I had an older sister, seven years old. So, she was in her own world. I was a little kid, and TV became my friend. And I got lost watching, uh, American Bandstand⁵³. Not knowing that my father built a house on Long Island, and that I would be living there.

And by the time I was in the first year of junior high, I befriended a fellow named Rick Shutter, who's been honored in the, uh, Modern Drummer magazine. Two-page article about him. It's a little picture of me, too. He introduced me. I – I – I asked him to be in my band. A guy – a kid was riding down the street with a guitar, and I go, "Is that a guitar?" He goes, "No. It's a bass." I go, "Listen. Let me hear you play." I put a band together. It was called The Young Executives.

My father came down the basement. Now, remember I'm 12 years old. And he goes, "You guys are pretty good." He says, "I think I'll manage you." Within a year, we wore derbies, custom made suits. I had a wall full of, uh, big amplifiers. He bought us all top equipment. My – my favorite Strat – Stratocaster. My Fender. Next thing you know, we're playing parties for The Beatles⁵⁴, The

⁴⁹ Aretha Louise Franklin (March 25, 1942 – August 16, 2018).

⁵⁰ Charles Walter Rainey III (June 17, 1940 –).

⁵¹ Cornell Luther Dupree (December 19, 1942 – May 8, 2011).

⁵² Bernard Lee "Pretty" Purdie (June 11, 1939 –).

⁵³ American Bandstand was an American music and dance television program from 1952 to 1989.

⁵⁴ The Beatles were an English rock band from 1960 to 1970.

Rolling Stones⁵⁵, Barbra Streisand⁵⁶, Anthony Newley⁵⁷. I met everybody by the time I was 14. And we got signed to Mercury Records.

So, as a flashback, here we were the youngest band in history on the Billboard charts. Our first record was called “Everybody Do the Duck”, which was a dance—dance routine. And we were booked on all the big shows. Merv Griffin⁵⁸, Clay Cole Show⁵⁹. And we—the biggest thrill was we were on “Rate-a-Record” on Bandstand. Now, remember, as a little boy, I watched Bandstand. Dick Clark⁶⁰. And now, I’m watching our record, “Everybody Do the Duck”, in competition with a famous British band called The Searchers⁶¹. And our record won the “Rate-a-Record”. We beat out The Searchers. I mean, this is a—amazing.

And so, uh, from that point, I turned 14. And we were doing concerts. We opened up at the Commack State Stadium⁶² in Long Island for Gary Lewis & the Playboys⁶³ and The Troggs⁶⁴. [sings] Wild thing [imitates song]. And, uh, that was life.

And then one day, when we were booked on Merv Griffin, uh, the bass player, Steve Wagner, his father says, “Oh. Steve can’t make it. He has a dentist appointment.” And my mother goes, “That’s it. That’s the end of the band.” She couldn’t believe that he would make a deal out of a dentist appointment when we were ready to break out in front of 25 million people on the Merv Griffin Show. That was the end of that.

0:24:11

Attending preparatory school in Queens and becoming involved in the Broadway musical *Godspell*

Cutler

And so, I turned 14. I was put into a—a—a yeshiva. A Jewish—very expensive Jewish prep school in Jamaica Estates in Queens, Long Island. Eh, well, Queens. And, uh, for the next three years, I became the head of the music department. And I put on the shows at the assembly. I got to play my guitar again. But I was back in Normalville. I was in the normal zone.

⁵⁵ The Rolling Stones are an English rock band formed in 1962.

⁵⁶ Barbara Joan “Barbra” Streisand (April 24, 1942 –).

⁵⁷ Anthony Newley (September 24, 1931 – April 14, 1999).

⁵⁸ The Merv Griffin show was an American television talk show that ran on NBC from 1962 to 1963, in first-run syndication from 1965 to 1969 and again from 1972 to 1986, and on CBS from 1969 to 1972.

⁵⁹ The Clay Cole Show was an American rock music television show from 1959 to 1967.

⁶⁰ Richard Wagstaff Clark (November 30, 1929 – April 18, 2012).

⁶¹ The Searchers are a English band formed in 1959.

⁶² Commack Arena, also known as The Long Island Arena, was an indoor arena in Commack, New York from 1959 to 1996.

⁶³ Gary Lewis & the Playboys were a pop/rock group from 1964 to 1970.

⁶⁴ The Troggs are an English rock band formed in 1964.

And then, when, um, I was in my second year of college, Rich Shutter calls me up. He said, "Somebody just walked in who, uh, wrote a play. And he's looking for, uh, some musicians." He says, "Bring your guitar over." I go, "I'm not interested. I'm going to go to NYU⁶⁵ to become an entertainment lawyer." I thought I could help a lot of people. And that would be fun.

So, I—he convinced me. I came over there with my guitar. And in walks a fellow named Stephen Schwartz⁶⁶. He goes to the piano and he plays all these songs. I go, "What do you call that?" He goes, "*Godspell*". "What do you mean? Like gospel?" He goes, "Yeah. Something like that." I go, "That's guitar music." And I'm able to listen and play back instantly. That was a lucky thing of—that I could do mentally. And I play back. He says, "Man. I was you in the show. I want you to—I want—I want you to be my guitarist."

And I told my dad about it. I go, "This guy named Stephen Schwartz asked me to be in his play." My father goes, "Those plays close in two weeks." *Godspell* ran for 12 years on Broadway. I did 8—800 shows. Eight shows a week for 18 months. Recorded the original cast album. I got my first Grammy. I was the lead guitarist, and I invented all the parts, actually. Because Schwartz put a chord chart down. So, there were all the chords. But when it came to the solos, I made them all up. And the album went to the Top 10. In the—that—number one in the world. And it's still going. It's still going. It's playing in Tampa, I just read, for, uh, a week or ten days in March. Uh, into March. Like it starts late February into March 2024.

0:26:37

Leaving *Godspell*, finding a manager and the importance of management and agency to a successful music career

Cutler

Uh, nonetheless, I ended up signing with Brut Fabergé because I just came out of a hit show, and I had some managers. So, I'm going to get into the—more structure. So, at the time I left *Godspell*, I had enough of it. And I picked up my guitar and I walked around Manhattan, knocking on doors. And said, "I write my own songs. I play guitar. I'm all compact. I'm—I'm everything. I sing. I play. And I write 'em." And, uh, first one was, uh, somebody—they offered me \$10,000 to sign with one company. But I didn't feel right at that time. And I kept knocking on doors. And finally, I knocked on the door of one of these managers, not knowing that the partnership—one fellow's name was Bob Bregman. I didn't know it, and I should have known it, but his brother was Martin Bregman⁶⁷, who produced all the Al Pacino⁶⁸ movies. And strangely enough, Al Pacino is 100% Sicilian, like me. And 11 years older. And I would—20. I had a good look at the time. I would have ended up in all those movies. But I—which I—whoever is

⁶⁵ New York University is a private research university in New York City founded in 1832.

⁶⁶ Stephen Lawrence Schwartz (March 6, 1948 –).

⁶⁷ Martin Leon Bregman (May 18, 1926 – June 16, 2018).

⁶⁸ Alfredo James Pacino (April 25, 1940 –).

watching this, think twice before you make a move. Before you leave something. Because you'll look back and years later, that – how did I make that mistake?

But I didn't know Bob Bregman was Martin Bregman's brother. Because that's – here's my point. If you really want to be – if you want a job as an entertainer, and you want to make a living at it, and you want to write songs, make records, and go on tour, be signed to an agency, you need a top manager. I've said this to everybody in L.A., I – which I lived over 20 years. Tell me who your manager is, and I'll tell you how far you're gonna go. How does a Snoop Dogg⁶⁹ get on a Katy Perry⁷⁰ album? Think about it. I mean, they just pick up the phone and they go like this. "Hey, Bob. It's John. Listen. We want to move Snoop more into the white market. Let's put him on Katie's album." "Now, that's a good idea." That's how it works. Just like that.

So, if you're dreaming about stardom, the only way that you could really make it and do television and videos and be on tour, remember it's a business. It's the business of showbiz. And it's a business. Managers take anywhere from 15 to 20%. Although with Elvis⁷¹ and Colonel Parker⁷², he had 50%. They were 50/50. But look what he did. A – agents generally take 10%. Maybe 15%. Like big agencies like William Morris⁷³ or GAC⁷⁴. Those are the big ones. So, if you have a top manager and a top agent, you got a shot. Because the record company, if it's that good, will promote it. And you'll go on tour. And you'll make money on tour. And, uh, if you have a tight little band that's good, you'll have a bus. You'll be a tour bus. And you – that's your life.

And if you have a certain knack for acting, at some point, you be – you move as you get older – when I'm watching Steve Harvey⁷⁵ on the \$100,000 Pyramid⁷⁶ – I looked him up. I couldn't believe he's totally bald now with a big mustache. He was a handsome guy with a full head of hair. I just saw him yesterday. But I watch that show every night. I'm addicted to gameshows.

Meanwhile, my point before I end this thought: management, agency is the key to success. There's no other way. Period [*taps table*].

0:30:46

Repackaging his music and re-releasing it

Cutler

In the meantime, as a quick review [*knocks table*], uh, this album, let's see, for United Artists, which I re – redid. I repackaged. Then one day, I took the music

⁶⁹ Calvin Cordozar "Snoop Dogg" Broadus Jr. (October 20, 1971 –).

⁷⁰ Katheryn Elizabeth Hudson (October 25, 1984 –).

⁷¹ Elvis Aaron Presley (January 8, 1935 – August 16, 1977).

⁷² Thomas Andrew Parker (June 26, 1909 – January 21, 1997).

⁷³ The William Morris Agency was a talent agency from 1898 until 2009.

⁷⁴ General Amusement Corporation was an international talent booking agency from the early 1930s until 1975.

⁷⁵ Broderick Stephen Harvey Sr. (January 17, 1957 –).

⁷⁶ *Pyramid* is an American game show franchise that debuted in 1973.

from Disco Diet, which was really good. At the time, I put my girlfriend I— on it. And I repackaged the album. And I called it her last name: *Yú*, which in Chinese means “fish”, believe it nor not. And I repackaged it. And it gets a lot of airplay. Great sound. It’s all instrumental.

Then at one point, I had so many tracks of sound—I made a lot of demos. Before we would go in and make a s—final album, you have to demo your stuff. So, I went in. I actually have 22 tracks on this particular album called *Test of Time*. And it’s a great title because it still sounds really good. And I have all kinds of musicians on here, as I mentioned, with— with Bernard Purdie and Chuck Rainey. He’s on here with me. And I have, uh, Alice Cooper’s band on here. I even have on Track 18, *Live On*, Don Ellis⁷⁷, one of the greatest trumpet players in the world that I was fortunate to meet.

When we had— Randi, my girlfriend I mentioned earlier. That was Randi Pitch. After we broke up, she ended up marrying the vice president of Warner Brothers. And he went on to ma—to manage, uh, uh, the—the fellow, uh, who married, um—he was Australian. Keith— Keith Urban⁷⁸. Keith Urban came from Australia as a rock and roll guy. But because he landed in Nashville, they put some slide strings behind him to give him that country sound. But he’s really a rock and roll cat. He married, uh— what’s her name? Uh, famous actress. Uh, [*taps table*] It’s funny. I say her name all the time. But anyway, he married a famous actress with blonde hair. And, uh, Randi was married to the vice-president who went on to manage him.

And, uh, I guess Randi was very lucky. Because of her—I met her on every Valentine’s Day. I would look around like, “Who am I going to meet today?” Because I met this girl named Shirley on Valentine’s Day in 2008. I met Randi, who was instrumental in connecting me with the producers with this, on Valentine’s Day in 1996. So how many year[sic] difference is that? That’s, uh, 12 years? Yeah. Is that 12 years? 12 years. I went from this to this in 12 years. And it happened again. So, I’m like in the 12 years cycle.

0:33:53

Moving to Winter Park, recording an album inspired by the city, getting re-married, recording a 12-album set of music inspired by astrology and marketing it through eclectic sound pallets

Cutler

Then I moved to, uh, uh, Orlando. And I love Winter Park, which is a great place. It’s the nicest place in Orlando. Sort of like somewhat of the Beverly Hills or Brentwood of— of Florida. And I was so taken by Winter Park and all the restaurants and the park itself—they have concerts—that I decided to make an

⁷⁷ Donald Jonson Ellis (July 25, 1934 – December 17, 1978).

⁷⁸ Keith Lionel Urban (October 26, 1967 –).

album called “Music of Winter Park”. And I named it “Heart”. And it was a dedication album as an homage to the City of Winter Park. And it sold out.

Then I got married. And my wife’s family owned one of the biggest radio stations in Orlando—I was lucky—called, uh, uh, WLOQ, which they coined the phrase “smooth jazz”. And they had all the top artists come into Orlando. And they would play in Winter Park at the park. And have a concert scene. They still do that today. And that was 1998. 1999. I met her. Her name was Elizabeth. And for three years, we had a great time. And she—and at that time I was going to go into real estate. And we got married. And I bought six acres. And, uh, she had two little kids. And I built a treehouse. And I walked around the neighborhood saying, “If you want to sell your house, call me first.”

And, uh, [*knocks table*] one day she said to me, “You know, you should make a new album.” I go, “Who needs another Jesse Cutler album?” I go, “Let me think about that.” Saying that to me is like telling an ex-drug addict, “Oh. There’s some heroin over there.” You know? Like music to me was—I do no drugs, by the way. Music is my drug. My passion. My magic. Music completely—I listen to music. And I’m driving every day. All—all—most of the day. Everyday. And I’m—I’m blessed. Because when I have Spotify on, all of a sudden, my face pops up. And my music’s coming through there. What a gift. But that’s from hard work. That’s from really moving around. And if that happens to you, you’ll remember what I’m saying.

Well, after we got divorced, I gave her the property. And I got an apartment. And during my marriage, I came up with the idea—when she said, “Why don’t you make a new album?” That was like kind of the worst thing she could have ever told me. Because after I thought about it, instead of making one album, I made [*knocks table*] 12 albums. I came up with the concept of scoring every astrological sign. And in my head, because I’m a marketing person, every human being on Planet Earth is one of these signs. So, the marketplace is 100% consumable. 100%. Everybody is one of these. And that means you could buy for yourself, or you could buy one [*knocks table*] as a birthday gift. And so, my target was Hallmark⁷⁹. And it—when you opened them, not only did I have music, but I had all the information about each particular astrological sign. I get to throw some of my pictures in there. And it was a—a little—little something here about me. And so, this was—this is because she says, “Why don’t you make another album?” And this was very expensive [*knocks table*]. That’s—that’s [*knocks table*] 12 albums, but I actually made 13. I made a sampler. I took one track from each album, and I made a sampler. And so, [*knocks table*] I packaged 78 in a—a beautiful custom box. With 78 albums. And we placed them in stores. I didn’t get

⁷⁹ Hallmark Cards, Inc. is an American company that manufactures greeting cards, party goods, gift wrap, stationery, and produces the Hallmark Channel on television.

Hallmark, which I—I'm s— was shocked because it was perfect for them. But I sold out.

And so, after we [hits table] got divorced, I [taps table] got my apartment. And I'm thinking, "Hm." Well, I was advertising "Music of the Stars" in *New Age Retailer*⁸⁰ magazine. I was buying full-page ads to promote this. And I befriended the head of advertising. I came up with an idea. I saw all these people advertising their musical albums, so I held the magazine to my head. I didn't hear anything. In other words, just having a picture of an album is one thing. But imagine if you could hear it. So, I came up with the idea of ESP: eclectic sound pallets. In other words, I would put 16 or 17 people on this album, and make a deal with a New Age retailer, which went to three continents, to put this on the front cover of the magazine with a poly bag around it, with a full-page color ad, and a website that showcased each—each artist with a clip and a biography. And it would connect to them. So, it's interconnecting. I took all three things: music distribution, magazine full-page ad, and the website.

Now, I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but after you do this many albums, and p—and play with that many people, and that many producers and agents [thumps table], you start to see things in a different way. This was probably one of the greatest things I ever did. And I managed to make 10 New Age albums and two albums for *Latin Beat Magazine*⁸¹ on the front cover. I even got, uh, what's his name? Uh, the most famous conga player. I—I got his son. I can't think of it now. But, uh—but, uh, I got a lot of top artists. Spanish. And because I couldn't speak Spanish—Habla un poquito español—my friend, Tony, spoke fluently five languages. So, I made him a producer. And he got all happy about it because his name went on every album, and on the full-page ads. Anthony Hattenbach [taps table].

0:40:56

Advice for aspiring entertainers

Cutler

Anyway, that's a little bit of that. I think that, uh, the bottom line is all these products that I've made, and all the experiences I've had, I'm saying to you if you're dreaming about having a career in show business, get a—get a—make your demos. Get a manager. You're going to need a publisher, and you're going to need an agent [taps table]. Then you're set. Then you may have a career. And on your tax form, it says "vocation". You put "entertainer" [taps table]. And that's how you do it. You set up a corporation, and that's the bottom line.

0:41:39

Running a marketing company, writing his autobiography and finding a publisher

⁸⁰ *New Age Retailer* is magazine that began publishing in 1986 and changed its name to *Retailing Insight* in 2012.

⁸¹ *Latin Beat Magazine* is a publication dedicated to all styles of Latin music that launched in 1991.

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Cutler Meanwhile, these days [*rubs table*] I think about – at one point, I said, “You know, I should write a book.” And, uh, in 1989, I was running a big marketing company that published all these little magazines that were distributed through Walgreens, Eckerd’s, Rite Aid. Everywhere at the cash register. And I thought that was a good idea. And I sold advertising. And I became a manager. Then I became the east coast director. Then I became the national director over 38 states. But if I hadn’t done all that I’ve done, that would never have happened. Because now it’s all about communication, and channeling whatever it is that you’re doing to the right audience.

Well, one day, I decided – I told my girlfriend, uh, “I’m going to write a book for the benefit of all dreamers wanting to be in show business. It’s called *Starlust: The Price of Fame*.” And starlust means lusting for stardom. That’s what that means. And, uh, I was fortunate enough to get Joe Renzetti⁸², who won the Oscar for *The Buddy Holly Story*⁸³, to bless my book on the back cover. Stephen Schwartz, who wrote *Godspell*, *Pippin*⁸⁴, *The Magic Show*⁸⁵, and *Wicked*⁸⁶, signed the back cover. My friend, Ezra Kliger, who I spoke to this morning, was the conductor for Marc Anthony⁸⁷, Neil Diamond⁸⁸ and just about everybody, as a top violinist. First violinist. Then he became a conductor. And I’m pushing him to write a book called, uh – what is it? I gave him some ideas. Uh, I keep pushing him.

But – so, my girlfriend at the time in 1989 would drop me off at the library, starting on Jan [*taps table*] uary 1st, from [*taps table*] 9:00 in the morning to [*taps table*] 6:00 at night. [*taps table*] Five [*taps table*] days a [*taps table*] week. And [*taps table*] all [*taps table*] I [*taps table*] did for [*taps table*] seven [*taps table*] months was [*taps table*] write [*taps table*] every [*taps table*] day. You got be disciplined. On July 31st, a girlfriend of mine’s birthday – I’m godfather to her daughter – calls me up. She says, “Come meet us at, uh, Maria’s Café.” I go, “You know what? I just finished my book. It’s your birthday. So, it’s sort of a birthday for my book, too. Yeah. I’ll come.” We get – we get there. And, well, I wrote a book.

But let me tell you, you have to have that – I wrote everything on a yellow pad. I had stack[sic] of yellow pads. Handwriting. I had to hire somebody to convert it into text. Which I did. Now you got[sic] to get a publisher. Well, to be honest, it took – I figured it out. I finished July 31st, 1989. It wasn’t published until 2008. So, that – what is that? 19 years? Or 18 years. It took about 18 years to finally publish it. How did I get it? Because I was in advertising, I met two fellows. I said, “Oh. Is this your company? Do you have a trademark?” I go, “I’ll do that for you. And, uh, 750 each.” So, I did two trademarks. And one of the fellows, I d –

⁸² Joseph Renzetti (January 4, 1941 –).

⁸³ *The Buddy Holly Story* is a motion picture film released in 1978.

⁸⁴ *Pippin* is a 1972 musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Roger O. Hirson.

⁸⁵ *The Magic Show* is a 1974 musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Bob Randall.

⁸⁶ *Wicked* is a 2003 musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Winnie Holzman.

⁸⁷ Marco Antonio Muniz (September 16, 1968 –).

⁸⁸ Neil Leslie Diamond (January 24, 1941 –).

delivered the trademark. I got it for him. And I had one spot left on my advertising booklet. And I go, "Why don't you take the last spot here? It's fi—it's 1,500. I'll give it to you for 1,000." And he—he paid me cash. And after, I went to print and brought him a copy. I go, "You know, Michael. You know I could really use a partner. I have a book I'd love to publish." And there, God struck lightning again. "[taps table] How much you need?" "I don't know. 35. 40,000." He goes, "Meet me at the bank tomorrow." And it happened just like that. And my book went on. It's all over the world. It's distributed worldwide on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. And I went on a book tour.

0:46:05

Closing remarks and future goals

Cutler So, if you're listening to all this stuff that I'm telling you, it all started when I was 13 years old with my little band of Long Islands. And my father was the manager. And he was great. So, your manager, again, is the key—na[sic], but I continued on and on and on. And I've had my ups and downs. But I kept going. And today, my goal is to take *Starlust: The Price of Fame* and make a movie based on my book about the climb as a child, whose dream was to perform and make it as a star in life to the world globally. And that's my next challenge. And I'm going back to California to do that in a few months. And that's where I'll leave it right there. *Starlust: The Price of Fame*.

Cravero Mr. Cutler, thank you so much again for sharing your time and speaking with us today. I really appreciate it.

Cutler My pleasure.

Cravero Alright. Well, this has been Geoffrey Cravero with Jesse Cutler at the University of Central Florida on February 23rd, 2024.

End of Interview