

**“Things that you hope a human being will be”:
Jane Bunnett in conversation with Ajay Heble**
The 2011 Improviser in Residence Interview
Transcribed by Elizabeth Johnstone

On February 11, 2011, I sat down with Toronto-based soprano saxophonist, flutist, and bandleader Jane Bunnett for an interview in front of a live audience at the Guelph Public Library for a session of Thinking Spaces: the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice Reading Group. Earlier that day, Jane had participated in a series of unannounced public interventions during which she and two other musicians (Rob Wallace and Amadeo Ventura) had walked into Guelph cafés, libraries, and a downtown bookstore with their musical instruments in hand. Handing out sundry percussion instruments to passersby and encouraging participation from her (sometimes captivated, sometimes bewildered) accidental audiences, Jane and her fellow animators transformed these public spaces, which, for a few moments, unexpectedly came alive with the spirit, spark, and sense of creative community-making that so often characterizes improvised music. These interventions were the first in a series of public events to showcase Jane Bunnett's role as our inaugural year long Improviser in Residence, a new initiative made possible through a partnership between the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice research project and Musagetes. In the interview, we had a wide-ranging conversation focusing on Jane's impressive body of work, her plans for the year long residency, the social force or improvised forms of creative practice, and the characteristics that define a good improvising musician: in Jane's words, "that the person listens when you're playing with them, the person is generous, the person is supportive. All these things that you hope a human being will be will come out in the musical activity." – Ajay Heble

Guelph Public Library
February 11, 2011.

AH: And now I'll be talking to Jane [Bunnett]. Jane is our inaugural Improviser-in-Residence, which is part of a collaborative partnership between the ICASP project—Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice—and Musagetes. When we were searching for candidates for this inaugural residency, Jane quickly rose to the top of our wish list. She is, of course, no stranger to the Guelph community. She's gifted us with several remarkable and memorable performances here, over the years, at the Guelph Jazz Festival. She also comes to us with significant experience working with at-risk and inner-city populations, and with a profound commitment to inter-cultural music-making. She's a multiple Juno award winner, a recipient of the Order of Canada, a Grammy Award nominee, and an artist whose recordings and performances have allowed her to move impressively across many dimensions of musical experience. Working in and working across different contexts of music-makings—Cuban musics, post-Monk and post-Mingus, avant-garde, free jazz, new music, gospels, spirituals, and the list goes on—she's worked with Don Pullen, Steve Lacy, Sheila Jordan, Jeanne Lee, Charlie Haden, Andrew Cyrille, the Penderecki String Quartet, Slim Gaillard, Henry Grimes, Hilario Duran, Paul Bley, the Cuban piano masters, Billy Hart, Stanley Cowell, Dewey Redman, and the list goes on and on and on. It's a veritable who's who of creative music. Indeed, her work represents an exceptional trajectory through the entire history of contemporary jazz and improvised music. It really is an honor to have you here as part of our residency program.

JB: Thanks. It's an honor to be given this great opportunity. It's a challenge, but every time I'm coming into town I just think that it's a gift also for me because for me there will be a lot of self-discovery, being aware of things that I take for granted. So, this is an interesting facet, to have a different learning curve with this.

AH: Perhaps we could start by talking about the work you're going to be doing as part of your residency here. This is, of course, a brand new initiative for us and for you—and it's really one

I've dreamed about for a long time— having an Improviser-in-Residence position. We've all heard about Composers-in-Residence, Artists-in-Residence...but I've always thought, wow, wouldn't it be great to have an Improviser-in-Residence position. And from the start it's been about something that's a little bit different from the standard academic residency. For me, this is first and foremost a *community* residency, that is, we want to bring artists and community partners together to create these sustained projects in the community. It certainly means a lot to have you here. Can you talk about what it means for you to be the very first Improviser-in-Residence here in Guelph?

JB: As I mentioned, there's already been some sort of discovery, things that, like I've said, I've taken for granted. My observations that I've taken, even from [the unannounced public interventions] today, is that people ultimately do have rhythm. We white people have rhythm! But it was interesting because if in the library you could see that people were joining in, that some of them were sort of half way there because of the commitment to just totally engage...if they were amongst friends there was a little part of them that didn't totally want to take the hand off the laptop. I don't know if they were half pretending they were doing something---I couldn't do that—half doing the rhythm thing and then typing. But generally people looked quite happy when they engaged in the musical activity.

AH: The first thing I noticed was just the smiles.

JB: Mmhmm.

AH: At the library, and the Bookshelf, and the café, you went in unannounced and provided them with the gift of music and people were lighting up.

JB: It's an incredible opportunity we as musicians have, like you said, to engage the community and draw people out and hopefully be conduits—is that the right word—to be able to get different groups to...this is a new thing, and for me, you can't sort of walk in and say "I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this." These ideas are sort of moving around and as I get to know people, and get to know the personality of a certain group, and of course, the facilitator that you're working with, I see that there will be tie-ins. At first, when we talked about doing that, I thought "this is contrived, I don't see how this is possible," when you've got people with all sorts of different issues. But I think it will be possible to put some groups together that people maybe wouldn't have thought could work together. For example, we've just done a couple of sessions at Homewood [Health Centre], and both of them have been totally different. The first one was quite remarkable because there was one woman who came in, and she definitely did not want to be there. She came in and she looked very, very unhappy. She's from Nunavut, and I had been told that she hated white people, so prepare for that, and I don't blame her....She was sitting there, and right away when someone has their arms like this it's going to be hard to pry those arms away and put an instrument in there. Gradually we were able to connect and she was able to connect with the group. At one point, it was so funny...it was either that day or the day before, working with KidsAbility, which is another group, I guess you are all familiar with KidsAbility. We worked with them the year before and we were doing this potato chip song and it turned into peanut butter, and I mentioned this to the group at the Homewood. Taking a word and how words have rhythm, like peanut butter. She picked up on it right away, this woman. Peanut butter. Oh, I should backtrack a bit. Just before that we were all sitting down drumming and I got up and I started to move with the drum. I started to actually dance a bit with the drum as I was playing. And she got up and all of a sudden she was dancing around the room, hitting the drum, and she had heard me talk about peanut butter and she starting going "peanut butter, peanut butter," and she's hitting the drum and really getting into it. "Peanut butter," and everyone started joining in. The doors were open and I thought, "If anybody walks by, if any of these doctors walk by, they're probably going to close us down." But we were all singing and everyone hitting the drum, going, "peanut butter, peanut butter," and she was having the time of her life. And at the end, we just sort of talked as we were packing up and I asked her, "How do you feel?" And she said, "I have never been so happy in my entire life."

AH: So what do you think accounts for that change?

JB: Well, I think the fact that she was connecting with people that she's probably been sitting

around with in group therapy and been probably very intense. A lot of people in that place are going through something at that time, and I think that in so many ways, that music, in a million different ways, and one of the things is that it takes you out of....that it's not just you...that you're part of something bigger, and also that you do have some control. I think with music there's something that is bigger than you but you're still a part of it and you still feel like you have some power to control what's happening. You're a part of something, you're a part of the piece, you're a part of what is happening at that moment. I think it's abstract, but at the same time it's such a grounded thing. You know, we've had music in our culture since way before the language, we had words, so if it was banging rhythms, that existed before. And I think it's just such a strong instinct. And in our culture, in North American cultures, because in so many others it's not a problem, and in Cuban culture I've seen it first hand, that everybody is a participant in Cuban music. You don't sit back and watch other people perform. You may have other people that are better musicians or more equipped, or technically they're advanced, but still there's a participation. The audience are very important participators in musical activity in other cultures, and in our culture it's been cut off. Even in East Coast culture there's more, Newfoundland and P.E.I. and those places, there are kitchen parties and music. People are banging on something. So they're engaged in the activity, whereas here, we have sort of left it for...it's a specialty.

AH: So these interventions that you've just done today, of course, were an attempt to encourage people to engage in that act of participation?

JB: Yeah. I think even if it just makes somebody think for a moment about music, then that, in itself, is even an important thing: "Oh, there was some musical activity that sort of passed by me today." And I think anything that you do as a group, and in the reading I've been doing lately, that's why even those rock songs, "We will rock you," look at the phenomenon, stadiums of people going (Jane demonstrates) stomp, stomp, clap, stomp, stomp. All these people that are just engaged in something, and it's so powerful.

AH: I know you've spent a lot of time and energy in preparing for the work you're doing here. [To audience] While Jane is here she's going to be working with several different groups in the community, ranging from students in high school to patients at healthcare centers to people who have acquired brain injuries, people suffering from trauma, kids with physical and mental disabilities. [To Jane] And I know that you've spent quite a bit of time thinking about each of these groups you're working with and designing projects specific to those groups. I'm wondering if you find yourself following the plans that you've prepared or are there situations where you find yourself having to reinvent your methods? I'm thinking by way of a context for this question about a comment you made to me in a previous interview. You were talking about that wonderful record you made with Paul Bley, *Double Time*, about how you really prepared for that recording by working on all this music, and when you sat down to do the record with Paul he resisted your efforts. You said to me, "He didn't really let me prepare." You told me in that earlier interview, that Larry Cramer, your musical and life-partner, told you, "This is what you do best. This is what you practice for. This is why you spend all those hours working on things, so you can jump into a situation like this and just play. And not play the licks that you've been working on." And I wonder if there is some thing similar going on in the work for this residency. I know you've been talking about these plans you're putting into place. Are those plans being resisted when you find yourself in the moment in those situations?

JB: Well, I'm sort of formulating things, formulating projects that I would like to see happen, but there will ultimately be a lot of shifting because I know some of the stuff is not totally formulated. And I think that it's really important for me to get a sense, like I said, of the dynamic of the group. Like especially, for example, [when working with students at the alternative high school] *Give Yourself Credit*. These kids must have an incredible amount of courage to be doing what they're doing. It's really hard for them. A few of them have kids, too, and here they are they're working towards a high school credit. So my idea may not be their idea. I might get in there and they might totally resist. What I think is so cool is not so cool. And then I'm going to have to do some shifting because ultimately I want them to be engaged in something they are really excited about. You have to go with the group and work with them and what they want. I

can't just go in and impose some idea that I think is so cool. So I'm hoping that they are going to think that the idea is cool and that we'll be able to do something that's going to give them a face. I'm very project-driven. Being the sort of person that I am, I need to have a goal at the end when I do something. So with each group I've tried to think of something that will showcase the work in the end to the community and will maybe bridge a gap. In the case of Give Yourself Credit, that these kids will be able to vent if they need to vent on what their situation is, that somehow they can get some respect. And that the community will respect the organization and what these kids are trying to achieve, and they'll get a credit for it too.

AH: Let's talk about improvisation, which is, of course, the central focus for this residency. What attracts you to improvised music and do you think there's something, in particular, about improvised music-making that speaks to and resonates with these communities that you're working with, many of which are marginalized?

JB: Well, I guess the first thing is that you can never duplicate. Every performance, every activity is unique in itself and that's what makes it special. We're trying to develop something, and if, by improvising, we improve on an idea...that doesn't mean that we're always going to do something totally, totally different but we're going to embellish something, make it bigger, go one direction, go a different direction than expected but still on a course. That's the exciting thing for me, just starting with a blank wall, nothing's there, and then creating something, something that has meaning not only to the people doing it but the activity at that moment, the pleasure that you get when you actually are playing. Like with musicians, when you're playing with like-minded musicians, that feeling is one of the most wonderful feelings in the world. Time stops.

Everything stops. You kind of lose sense of yourself. I mean, I always find for me no matter how terrible I feel...there was one day when I walked into the Homewood, and I just really felt like I was the last person who should be in here with these folks because I feel terrible myself today. And I felt great afterwards. I mean after the activity, working with them, and just improvising, I felt so much better. That connecting, there's no language, it's the music that's happening. It's a very powerful and very remarkable thing to do.

AH: This comment that there's no language except for music puts me in mind of something else you said in that previous interview we did, which is perhaps worth repeating here. We were talking then about an ad hoc grouping of musicians, improvising musicians I'd brought together at the Guelph Jazz Festival. You were playing with Getatchew Mekuria from Ethiopia and Jah Yousouf from Mali and Alain Derbez from Mexico and Hamid Drake from the U.S. Musicians from all around the world. And the amazing thing about that event is that many of you were meeting for the very first time and doing so onstage in front of an audience and that you were performing with no prearranged musical direction, and there was no language in common. There was literally no language in common onstage, and yet, you created absolutely wondrous music. In thinking about that event we started talking in that interview about the extent to which musical improvisation might be linked with these broader social issues: communication, human rights, social justice, building community. And you said to me: "When you sit down and you're in a collective like that it entails all the things that we as human beings should just be, and in that way it can teach something to the listener to carry forth, too. Just dealing with all the things that life entails." Now it's clear to me that, in speaking with you, and indeed in speaking with so many of the artists who play at the Guelph Jazz Festival, that there is something profoundly important going on in that moment, when musicians improvise together, especially improvising across these global communities. Something profoundly important is going on in terms of the kinds of broader social issues we were talking about there. Now in your case, you've done a whole lot of work, not only in inter-cultural contexts... your work with and commitment to Cuban music and Cuban musicians certainly comes to mind...but you've also done a lot of work in Toronto and now in Guelph with at-risk and inner-city kids and populations. I'm wondering if you can say a bit more about how some of your previous experiences have shaped your understanding of the social importance of improvised music? And are there particular instances? You've already begun to talk about these in terms of some of the work you've done in the residency, but are there other particular instances you can talk about where you really felt that you were making a

difference, having an impact with your music, a particular kind of social impact? You mentioned some of the examples from Homewood. I know certainly from talking to the parents and the staff and the kids at KidsAbility about the work you did there a few years ago, it's tremendously inspiring for those people. But I'd be interested in hearing from you if there are particular moments that stand out as having an impact.

JB: Gosh, there are lots. It's more so down the road where people will come up to you and say, "Four years ago I heard you. I just was going through something or other was happening, and I heard a performance with you and did this thing and it just helped me so much." That kind of stuff, I do hear that a lot. Because I feel like the music that I do comes from a very spiritual place. I'm not a religious person in the context of going to church and that kind of thing—as much as I like churches—but I find for me when I play music I try to do it from a very deep place.

Musicians that I like to work with and hope to work with are the kind of people that, as human beings, even if they weren't musicians they would still be the kind of people I would want to be around. The fact that they play music is great. Those kind of personality traits in the music are very important, that the person listens when you're playing with them, the person is generous, the person is supportive. All these things that you hope a human being will be will come out in the musical activity. I think when the situation is right like that, you mentioned Dewey Redman and Don Pullen, many of the musicians that I've worked with have been from that place. Even Paul Bley, who's crazy, crazy. He's brilliant crazy, but he's still, as a musician, incredibly...I've never had quite an experience such as playing with Paul Bley, and what he gives as a musician. It's unexplainable, really. I think that translates to people, like the people that like what I do, and then you get that nice feedback. Because sometimes you just feel like chucking it, which I have.

Three years ago I was ready to quit music. I hit the wall and had enough. I made 17 records. I can't do it anymore. I'm tired. I'm tired of making records and I'm tired of touring. I'm tired of feeling like, "Oh she just put out another record...great." But it was a very interesting transition to get myself out of that, and get back into music. So now I feel like with working at Homewood and working with some people, I know what that feeling is to feel disengaged from music too. I'm not the kind of musician...I think there are a lot of musicians out there who were, at seven years old, protégés, and by the time they were 17 or 18 they were terrific musicians. I haven't been an academic, and I started playing when I was 22. So I started quite late. But I feel musically because of certain things that have happened that I can connect with people musically. I have a different way of working and I think certain people pick up on that.

AH: In terms of the impact of your music, as I said earlier one example certainly comes to mind for me has to do with those workshops you did with KidsAbility here a few years ago.

JB: Rob [Wallace] was with us, too.

AH: Rob and Larry [Cramer] were part of that. This is an organization that works with kids who have physical and developmental disabilities here in Guelph, and they're all very excited to have you back working with the kids there again this year as part of your residency. Now when you were here a couple of years ago, those workshops that you did with the youth culminated in a brilliant performance that you did at the Jazz Festival tent, which is the largest outdoor venue at the Jazz Festival, where there are literally thousands of people. Those workshops were hugely inspiring I think for all of us, and anyone who was participating and watching. Many people in the audience were moved to tears. And the interviews that we conducted afterwards with the participants and with the staff from KidsAbility made it clear just what a significant impact you had on those kids. And I remember remarking to you right after that final concert with the kids how...I think you only had three or four workshops with them....imagine if we had a whole year. Well, now we do. That's the amazing thing. I thought you were able to accomplish so much just in that short period of time. So, now we have a whole year, and I'm wondering what this opportunity for extended contact might enable you to do that you couldn't do the first time around?

JB: I think fine tune things a bit more. I think some of the regulars that are back, they are more comfortable with me. They know me a little bit. And probably we'll increase the repertoire. We have a songbook together now. Thanks to Slim [Gaillard], he's given me some material to work

with. There's a couple of new kids in there. One who's really dynamite actually. We just have to make sure he doesn't steal the show because he's a bit of a ham. He's a great kid. I think we'll just be able to have more pieces of music, and be able to present them. Maybe give more kids more cameos than we had before.

AH: One of the things you did last time was you had each of the kids bring a photograph and create a kind of composition or story around the photo.

JB: Yes, we're doing that again too.

AH: I thought that was very successful.

JB: We've got a few things up our sleeve. It's gonna be fun.

AH: In addition to being a performer, improviser, composer, educator, and bandleader, you're also an organizer. Indeed, you're one of the driving forces behind the Art of Jazz Festival, and I know that the Art of Jazz has an educational mandate, that it does a lot of outreach work in the community as well. I'm wondering if you see connections between your work as a festival organizer with The Art of Jazz and the work you're doing with the residency.

JB: Yeah! It's just giving me more opportunity to develop my skills, number one. Well, number one, let me take my hat off to you because this kind of thing could never happen in Toronto, I don't think, what you've done. I mean maybe it could, but we're a long way from...because of the kind of community Guelph is. It's very rootsy and partly because it's a university town there's a great sort of feeling of teamwork here. I mean, just doing what we were doing today, I'm sure I would have got my soprano [saxophone] shoved down my...[grabs throat, laughs] if I did that at the reference library! I think there's a lot to learn by working in a smaller community...how to go out and then work in a larger community. It think some of the things we're doing...it would be very difficult. The Art of Jazz, we worked up in the Jane and Finch area with about 350 kids that were bussed in from all the schools up there up to one of the schools, CW Jefferys. We were working with John Hendricks, and that was, how do you say it, just an overwhelming project because of the amount of kids and the organization of trying to bus kids in. And the biggest thing is that, unlike here in Guelph, the family thing is so rough now in Toronto. There are so many moms and no fathers in the situation, so the family structure is so disheveled, and so when you're working with young people it's difficult. Very, very difficult. It's difficult here but not as difficult. I think I've been given an opportunity to do what I like to do and, maybe at some point, help in Toronto. Or actually, possibly going down into the Regent Park area. Next year they're building a whole new complex down there. So I think the Art of Jazz will be having an office down there, and we will be working with youth in music down there.

AH: So even though the festival is moving its location, you're going to continue to work in Toronto.

JB: Yes. The next couple of years we'll be working in Brampton, and they're sure we'll be there forever, and who knows, you know? But I'd like to get back into Toronto too, but for us in the Distillery [district] the place is just too rich for our blood [laughs]. In the sense—you all know the Distillery, right—they're about boutiques and the high-end. We're talking about the real estate people. What do you call them...the Corp. The corporation that's down there that owns everything in the Distillery, they're really not...I shouldn't be, I'll get in big trouble for this but, anyway...that it's not their agenda, really. So, that's why. They're building condos and two of the stages are gone that we were working in. Condos are going up and that's going to be two, three years of condo building. Yah. We need more condos. So, that's one of the reasons we moved to Brampton and they're thrilled to have us. But still I'd like to be back in Toronto, too. It's keeping your chops going, you know. Just keeping the momentum...you know what it's like, if you take a year off, it's tricky to get back in the saddle.

AH: That's true.

JB: That was the choice, but this is an amazing opportunity. Like I said, self-discovery, going to the Homewood and KidsAbility, and Give Yourself Credit. That's the group I like most... teenagers. I was a very, very rebellious teenager, and so fortunate that I ended up okay. Because,

you know, I had some real brushes in my teenage life. So I like to work with at-risk kids. I think the potential is HUGE for them. And just a lot of them have been dealt really crappy circumstances. They're not in the position where they want to be.

AH: What do you think the greatest challenges are going to be during this year that you're with us at Guelph?

JB: Take a guess?! Doing it all! It's a hell of a lot, right Kim!

Kim Thorne: You can do it.

JB: Just keep breathing.

AH: Making it all happen.

JB: Making it all happen. But I've got great people working with me, so...

AH: Shifting focus a little bit, can you talk about what it's like to be a woman improviser in what is largely a male-dominated field?

JB: Sometimes good, sometimes bad. Sometimes it's great! Let me put it this way, if it's a women's festival, it's great if they hire me. I love the women's festivals, and if they don't hire me, I hate them! Generally, it's great. I've been fortunate, partly because my partner is a trumpet player so he often can be in the picture. But I've had a couple of pretty bad experiences, when I didn't choose my adversaries, I guess is the word. A very bad experience in the North Sea at a jam session. I'll tell you that story another time...But it was actually a musician that was in Wynton Marsalis' big band, at the North Sea Jazz Festival Jam Session. I almost got in a fist fight on the stage because he told me I had to get off the stage, and that I shouldn't be playing, and to go home and practice. He pulled this...in front of a huge room of people, and I could have handled it better myself, but being feisty I decided to make a real scene out of it. But ultimately, I got him fired...because his display was really uncalled for. It was whole group of young women that were overseas. It was one of these IAJE [International Association for Jazz Education] all-women groups. They were all up front just watching this thing happen. So I kinda felt like...I just had it out with the guy. And then I wrote a letter and put it under his door and that went over well, but...[laughter] So, there's been a few things but not a lot. The reason being because a lot of the time I've chosen, I've been careful to not put myself in a situation where I will be really vulnerable and possibly get my feelings hurt. I haven't gone into situations trying to prove something. "I'm going to walk into the situation because I want to play," or something like that. The musicians that I've worked with have all been really supportive and great people, and so if you keep those kinds of things in mind then, you sort of buff yourself to what people are saying about you.

AH: What about the industry, more broadly?

JB: Well, to tell you the truth, I try and manipulate that. To be perfectly honest! I really do. I mean, my mother always said to me, "You get more bees with honey." I don't mean it the way that just came out. Oh, my god! But I mean, there's no reason to walk into a situation and be a certain way. You try to be up front and respectful and treat me...there have been a couple things that have happened, that I've lost....you know what's been more of a problem, to tell you the truth, and I seriously mean this, being Canadian.

AH: I was just going to say...

JB: Being Canadian. Not being white, not being a woman, but being Canadian, and not having a New York address. People have told me, the critics, US journalists, say stuff: "She doesn't live in the States." This is a New Yorky thing too. I've played in New York. "Well, she doesn't live here. Where's she from? Canada?" You can't be any good if you're from Canada. In fact Paul Bley was one of the musicians. He saw my bio when we were doing Double Time and he said, "Take it out that you're Canadian." He said, "Take it out of your bio. Don't say you're Canadian." I said, "Really? But I'm proud to be Canadian." He said, "No, that doesn't work," and he told me, "Get a New York address." He told me, "It doesn't even matter if it's just a box. Just get a New York address." And I was like, "God."

AH: So have you done those things?

JB: No, I haven't. I haven't. I haven't. Maybe I should. I should listen to Uncle Paul.

AH: I just have one more question.

JB: Well, they're good questions. They're hard questions.

AH: Earlier today you were involved in a number of unannounced public interventions, and I think they went off really well, and I was just wondering if you could tell us about your response to what went down.

JB: It was fun because I think most of the people were really nice. Don't you think, guys? They were nice. There wasn't one nasty....I know in Toronto, for sure, if we'd done it in Toronto there would have been 10 that would have been, "Get out of my face," definitely. But everybody was smiling. "Okay, I'll shake this. I don't really want to but I will."

AH: But by then they wanted to, right?

JB: Yes, some of them were sort of like...

AH: Those people in the library, on campus, they were totally into it!

JB: They were like, "I won't do it. I won't do it." But next time you see them, finally they got into it. And it was interesting because most people were sort of halfway there. They weren't totally (gesturing with a hand shaking up and down). There were a few that got totally into it, but there were some that were like, "I'm talking to my friend and I'm shaking the banana, and I'm doing my computer too." So they were wanting to hide a little bit behind something, and not totally look like they were getting into it. And I thought it was interesting too...I tried to make a point about looking into people's eyes...cause I tend to close my eyes sometimes when I play but I tried to look people in the faces as they were playing because that's an important thing when you're playing too....to have eye contact with the musicians. Because it's not ...I mean I do close my eyes when I'm concentrating but there still should be a certain amount of eye connection....because you get a sense of body language and where the music is going to go. Is this person really digging what I'm doing? Are they following? So it was interesting because everybody really looked me in the face. Nobody turned away when I looked at them.

AH: How did today's experience compare to the stint you did at St. Lawrence Market (in Toronto), where you were busking.

JB: Oh, that was painful. So for those who don't know, the [Toronto] Star did a...it was around JUNO time and they wanted to see how people respond to their Canadian....a Canadian artist." So luckily they put me in the St. Lawrence Market, which was better than [what they did with] Joshua Bell. They put Joshua Bell in the Wall Street subway. Poor guy. So this was a copycat thing. Some people would push their kids up. "Put some money in the hat. I'm not gonna do it, but you're gonna do it." So that was kind of interesting. Generally, people were quite nice but nobody did come up and speak to me. The Star reporters were running after them and asking them questions afterwards. But Joshua Bell, his experiences were terrible. Now mind you, it was work time. This was 8:30 in the morning. They actually had it on camera where the parents would have their kid and they would be taking them out of the subway, and the kid would be like, "What is he doing." Trying to see the violinist, and the parents were standing in front of the kid's view so they couldn't see Joshua even playing. "We're not going to stop for the music." And you see these kids, "I want to stay," and the parent pulling the kid. I made more money than he did [laughing]. I made forty-six dollars and he made twenty-five. It was very interesting. This was Wall Street, and I'm in a market. Much more the kind of person who wants to meet the sausage guy, and wants to talk sausages and stuff, whereas on Wall Street, no one's talking sausages. But it was a different environment. Still, the guy makes 30 to 40 thousand dollars a concert, and one woman put in 20 dollars because she'd seen him three weeks ago. But nobody recognized him. Nobody stopped a second to hear him. So, it was a pretty good experience, but this was better. We didn't give instruments out either. They probably would have run.

AH: Well, you brought some music...

JB: Well, you suggested I bring some...

AH: Do you want to play something?

JB: Well.....what do you think? I don't know...

AH: What did you bring?

JB: I brought this one that has a bunch of stuff. It's got some Paul Bley, and this is sort of my own bootleg. I make the bootleg 'cause I owe the record company like eight thousand dollars [laughs]. I can't buy any more CDs. So, I did this. Well maybe...this hasn't been released. I'm trying to think of what to do...maybe I'll play you this. This is something I did with all nature sounds in Algonquin Park. And it's just a short piece. I was actually commissioned by the CBC to do it. And it was interesting. There were six people commissioned to write music for their favorite park in Canada. So, I think Bruce Cockburn did one, and what's-her-name from out east. And everybody's piece was eight minutes, four seconds, eight minutes, six seconds, everybody's piece. Isn't that weird?

AH: It is weird.

JB: So this was done....[working with CD player] Oh, Miss Techie....with bata drums, which are the hourglass Cuban drums and myself on piano and playing flutes. And it's a song cycle. In the Afro-Cuban music you have all these different saints, which are connected to the elements of nature. So it can be fire, water, trees, green—they're connected to colours. They're called the Orishas. And this is a song cycle of all the different particular...because each saint has a particular rhythm. This is called bata mata chango. So it's all the whole cycle of all the Orishas compacted into this eight minutes. And you can hear all these nature sounds. So I'm trying to think what I'm going to do with this. I would like somebody to actually animate something for it. [Music plays.]

JB: Summer's only how many months? [laughs]

AH: That's beautiful.

JB: Thanks. That was kind of a different departure for me. I like playing that for Cubans because there is so much space in there, they're like "I don't get it." That was Pancho [Quinto] playing there.

AH: Oh, was it?

JB: Yah. That was fun playing with Pancho. Afterwards I took it back and played it for his family. It was cool and unusual.

AH: Maybe we can see if people from the audience have questions for Jane.

Audience Member: We all have that slightly blissed out expression of having meditated through that beautiful piece.

JB: It is...I haven't listened to it in a while but I like the zone it put me in when I was working on it. I would love to...I have this idea...I just haven't met the person to do it, but an animation. Do you remember Norman McLaren?

AH: I do.

JB: Do you remember the one where the drop of water hits the...it takes place in a canoe. Does it take place in a canoe or something and then there was a fly on his skin....? Anyway, I'd like something that would start with a drop of water, and then the ripples come out and then all these things start to happen with the ripples...animals ..

AH: I have someone in mind for you...

JB: Do you? Really? I'd like to do that. I don't know what I'd do with it after I do it, but...get it shown on an airplane or something. [laughing] Maybe, I don't know.

Audience Member: I want to ask a question about that really touching incident you brought up in the Homewood, with the indigenous woman who was so angry.

JB: Mmmhmm.

Audience Member: ...and then so happy. Where are you going to go from there?

JB: Well, it was interesting. So, so, so...I was so pumped on Wednesday to see her, right? So this is how life goes, right? I'm pumped and I told Larry about her. I called that night and I was pumped because I was really nervous about going into Homewood. Anyway, I'm all excited to see her and I'm waiting in the hall. Guys are waiting outside to load the stuff in and she's coming out to have a smoke, and I say, "Hey, how are you doing? We're going to play today." She said, "No, I'm not coming today." "Oh." I'm taking it totally personally, of course. "Ohh." "No," she said, "I'm having a caribou roast. And I've been waiting for the caribou roast. And, and, and," I

said, "Oh. It's only from three to four thirty. Can't you come and do the music and then go do the caribou roast?" She was going to a friend's house because someone had brought some caribou. And she said, "Nope. I've been waiting for this for a long time. And I'm taking him, and I'm taking her, and I'm taking..." and she ran down.... You're taking the whole class! So finally when Calvin [Clinical Social Worker at Homewood] came up, "Oh I've got an incident." "Well, don't worry. I've heard. I ran into her, and she told me." I don't know how she sabotaged the class. He said, "Maybe we'll just cancel because I don't see the point." But you know she was nice about it. I said, "I'm sorry. I'm gonna be so disappointed. You were so great last week. Oh, and I had some ideas about this week." "Nope. I'm not coming to class this week. You'll see me again but not today." So off she went. So Calvin said when we got in there, "I don't know. We'll see. I don't know what's going to happen. We'll see." So we went in there and there's two totally brand new people sitting on the stage. And I said, "Well, we can still do something with two people," and one other enthusiast. This one guy who's very enthusiastic. He's got one rhythm that he really does well and he does it a lot. He said, "Well, do I have enough time? Do you want me to go out and round up a few people?" "Sure, if you think you can." So he comes back in five minutes. No, he doesn't come back....all of a sudden these women start coming in the door...five...and then four more....and then he came and stuck his head in to make sure they got in and then he went out again. So he was out there hustling people in for the session. So how many did we have? Quite a few.

Audience Member: Ten or eleven.

JB: No, didn't we have more than that? It was way more than the first one. So, anyway, all these folks came in and they were pretty enthusiastic. And all first-timers except for a couple. And then one of the guys decided not to go to the caribou roast and come to the class. So, anyway, I hope she'll be here next week because she really did say she had a good time. Food won. Food and music, it's a tough call, right?

Audience Member: But maybe a similar collaborative community experience, right?

JB: Yeah, yeah, absolutely! Well, something like that is a part of somebody's culture. I don't blame her. Can I come? Is there really caribou?

AH: Any other questions from the audience?

Audience Member: I just was wondering when you were talking about the interventions today...because a lot of site-specific work that isn't in theatres, there are negotiations of the space and the people in the space and sometimes it's really complicated. And you were saying that in Toronto they would have been really annoyed and not into it. But I wonder if they would have been because I was worried about that here too because it's a library and people are supposed to be quiet.

JB: Yes.

Audience Member: I mean, upstairs I knew there would be kids that would be interested but I wasn't sure about downstairs. I wonder if it is about the way you set that up. There was such a warmth and there was such a connection with everybody. I think that possibly that was why people were willing to go with it. But I wonder how the kind of spaces and the people in the spaces affect the kind of music you make because obviously you've just done this beautiful site-specific park piece which is from Algonquin which is totally different...

JB: Well, definitely. If you get a bad reception you don't feel exactly welcome to be like, "I'm going to play for you ...if you like it or not." ...The Red Brick [Café] was especially easy to play because people were joining in. When you walk into a bigger space, like the big library, it's a little bit trickier because there is so much space. But in the smaller areas where you are contained, it's kind of like everybody ends up, when you have a party, in your kitchen. Why is that? When people are tight together, it's like people sitting in a circle playing. It was interesting, for example, with KidsAbility I'm now sitting on the floor which actually gives me some issues with my back, but it seems to be much better to be on the floor with them, playing with us all at the same eyesight. I don't know how we came about figuring that all out, but when I sit at the piano it's really [points] - maybe that's why we get you to play the piano! I'd like to do both but

we'll figure out...It's good because with the kids we're more connected, instead of being on chairs and people are all at different levels.

Audience Member: I was just thinking of the meat counter at the St. Lawrence Market saying it's too loud for my business and you feeling really...

JB: Oh I felt just terrible afterwards, like, "Okay, I'll just pack up and go..."

Audience Member: And the kind of conversation you had to have, right, of how to then think about playing your own music?

JB: No, I really didn't feel like playing afterwards, but if the guy's trying to make a living, you know, and he can't hear...gives her pork sausages and she wanted lamb, it's not good for business, so...

Audience Member: These negotiations in space are complicated ..

JB: But you know what, I guess music is also it's own negotiation, in a way. It's interesting because I've always just gone out and played music and now I'm having to think about things. Really hard!! (laughter). We musicians just want to play, eh? Give me a bottle of beer and I'll play. That's it. But now I have to think heady stuff. You're making me think, Ajay!

AH: Anybody else want to make Jane think?

Audience Member: Can I ask you a question about you and music? You say you were late coming to music. You were 22. And in sort of the same breath you said you were really profoundly affected by the power of connection through music. Is that what drew you to music?

JB: Yes. Absolutely. And I have to say there was one really pivotal experience. Everyone does have a pivotal experience. Ballet dancers...they say, when they went to see the Nutcracker. And everything was (Jane gestures with dancing fingers)...and that moment they decided that they wanted to do it. There's always some thing, and for me it was really hearing Mingus, Charles Mingus in San Francisco. It so blew my mind, because I thought they were all classical musicians. And later I told Don Pullen that and he just thought it was hilarious that I thought that. Here's a guy who started out playing organ in trios, you know, strip clubs and stuff. First church but his early gigs were.... Anyway, but I thought that they were all classical musicians because their technique was so...they had such command of their instruments. But then there was this dialogue that they were having together. I looked at that and thought, "This is one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. Look how these guys are communicating with each other." And that's what really made me think I want to become...I want to be in, up there, in that kind of environment where everybody is communicating like that. And I was playing classical piano at the time, so when I came back from that trip it was "finish up my piano studies, and I want to play jazz." I knew at that point.

AH: And here you are.

JB: And here I am. Here I am.

AH: I think we can do one more question.

Audience Member: Oh sure. The first time I saw you, Jane, was at the Arlington Hotel in Lake St. Peter.

JB: Oh!! Which year, which one? Was that the first year?

Audience Member: I was turning 55. It was the eve of Katrina.

JB: Oh, with Johnny. Oh dear, that was a rough night.

Audience Member: I was just wondering if you knew how he pulled out? He and his family.

JB: His house was kind of okay, but he lost...he had two really nice fishing boats, whatever those boats are they use in New Orleans...and to be totally honest, too, he split up with his wife over the stress of what happened to her. She was...he was with us...she was there, she got out of there and for three weeks he didn't know where she was because there was no cell phone. It was a very, very stressful time. She kind of went a little bit cuckoo. She kind of snapped out, and I never thought that might have happened because I knew her quite well.

Audience Member: Well, it's nice to have an update.

JB: And he's back in his house. He's back in his house now, but boy, I've known so many people that...I was down there three times after Katrina and just so many people lost their places. So he's one of the lucky ones.

Audience Member: And thank you for bringing Sheila Jordan and the others last year....

JB: So you were at that too!

Audience Member: It was the second time I saw you.

JB: Well, hopefully we're going to be up there in August. We've just picked the date: August 11 – 14. But once again it boils down to the Ontario Arts Council. But we'll still do something there, but hopefully it will be on a grand scale. Sheila loved it there. She really loved it. This is a great example of how music...so, we dragged her up there and she was like, "Where am I going?" It's just outside of Algonquin Park, a little tiny main drag. So we did this festival, and she happened to be in Toronto, coming for something and so we got her to come up and nobody knew her. So, this area's basically...well, you knew her?...Oh, so you hadn't heard her before?

Audience Member: No. No.

JB: Great, okay. So, we did something in the library. We were supposed to be outside but the weather was too crappy. And here's a place where the audience was made up of cottagers, rednecks, a little bit of everything was there, right? And she just won these people over. It was so moving. Nobody knew who she was and by the end she'd sold out all her CDs. She had quite a few CDs, and people were just in love with her. She just did what she does. She was just amazing, and in this area where people don't know jazz. They just loved her. It was great. See, often I'm part of rewarding things, that I'm not actually playing but I'm involved in, initiating. That's really, really great too. Glad you were at that.

Audience Member: We were too: Valerie and I met each other at that event.

JB: Are you kidding? [Jane claps] Valentine's Day is coming up too! [everyone laughs]

AH: Well, that's, I think, a nice place to end. Jane is going to be with us for the rest of the year, and she'll be coming to Guelph once a week. She's working with a wide range of groups in the community. There will be a number of public events coming up. I think we have some bookmarks that we could circulate with a few of the upcoming dates, but check out the ICASP website for updates, and please join me in thanking Jane Bunnett.

JB: Thanks. [clapping]