

On Her Own

Frank J. Oteri visits the home of Carla Bley to talk about making independent music

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1. Jazz and Non-Jazz Musicians

FRANK J. OTERI: You are unique. I don't know what to call the music you do except to say that it's great. Is it jazz? Is it fusion? Is it classical music? Is it progressive rock? Is it cabaret? Is it avant-garde music?

CARLA BLEY: It doesn't matter what it is. I'm just a person who writes for what it is. It's written for jazz musicians. I don't consider myself a jazz musician at all. I'm not spontaneous. I take a lot of time thinking about everything and when I finally get an idea during a solo, the piece is over. So, I'm really slow. I'm not a jazz musician; I wish I were. I'm just writing for them, as opposed to writing for classical musicians, or as opposed to writing for cabaret or the other things you mentioned. Those are not the people I write for.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you have. You've written for Ursula Oppens, for Speculum Musicae, the Houston Symphony...

CARLA BLEY: That was insignificant and a long time ago and unsuccessful.

FRANK J. OTERI: You've also written for Jack Bruce and Linda Ronstadt.

CARLA BLEY: Again, long time ago. But it's true. I suppose if you went back there... God! Scratch everything I thought. [laughs] I don't think I'm anything.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you've written primarily for jazz musicians, so that word does have a meaning for you. What is a jazz musician?

CARLA BLEY: You don't have to write everything down. You can leave a huge hole and they just fill it right up. It's more economical, time-wise... When I started, I used to write this tiny snippet of an idea and then they would play free for a half an hour and then they'd play the snippet again at the end. And that was my piece; I got the credit for it and the royalties and everything.

FRANK J. OTERI: OK. So you use this word jazz, but the music you write defies labels. Do you think labels ultimately mean anything to listeners?

CARLA BLEY: I could talk about that but I wouldn't have anything interesting to say. It would be something like: Well, people use music to identify themselves. Someone likes to think of himself as a bluegrass-type person and so that person listens to bluegrass. But that's not a musical answer. That's just sociological and not my forte.

FRANK J. OTERI: So what would you say is the ideal listener for your music?

CARLA BLEY: Someone who likes something that's not entirely correct. I'm not the listener's cup of coffee or Coca-Cola. I'm more like the listener's cup of pinhead gunmetal tea. And not a lot of people like pinhead gunmetal. So I understand that the coffee lovers are going to go

somewhere else and I'm going to get this very small amount of people who like really weird things.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, I haven't had pinhead gunmetal, but I love Chinese special gunpowder tea, are they related? [laughs]

CARLA BLEY: [laughs] That's probably why you're here!

FRANK J. OTERI: You don't consider yourself a jazz musician but certainly as a musician you've recorded numerous solos on albums on the piano, and on the organ; you've also played saxophone and you've sung.

CARLA BLEY: Those things happened one hour out of 25 years. Just because they're recorded, it doesn't mean I do them. When I played saxophone on my daughter's recordings, I picked it up a half-hour before the session and tried not to get a blister or something and then played it and put the saxophone away for five years. It's just a joke. And the singing thing was just a joke. The one time I sang on a record seriously was because the trombone player couldn't play the melody right. I had this great track and there was no melody on top so I just pitched in. I didn't realize that would make me a singer.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, you sing all over *Escalator Over The Hill*.

CARLA BLEY: That was 35 years ago! I wouldn't think of doing it now. When you're starting, you don't even know who you are at that stage. You're doing everything. And you don't know what's dangerous and what you don't want to be known as doing. You try everything. You do everything. And you're very un-fastidious about it and that is what I was. Rock and roll. My God, I was in a rock and roll band thirty years ago or something, I can't believe it, but just one, c'mon. It was six months. I just did it 'cause it was fun. It wasn't really a musical thing. And I like Jack Bruce a lot. I liked his records. So I did it. But I wouldn't do that today.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's great to hear you say "fun," because that's a feeling I get from all of your music, from the earliest stuff through to what you're doing these days. There are a lot of really serious ideas going on, and often a lot of experiments going on, but it's always fun to listen to.

CARLA BLEY: Thank you. I like that. I do like to have fun, and when I'm writing and something happens that's interesting or humorous, I have fun. At that moment, I laugh and it makes me feel good and I think I'll keep that in and maybe other people will feel good too.

2. Musical Origins

FRANK J. OTERI: I want to go back to the very, very beginning. What was your very first exposure to music?

CARLA BLEY: Well, that was before the '70s! [laughs] My first exposure to music was my father. He was a piano teacher and he played the organ in church and he was the choirmaster. It was a sort of a non-denominational Christian church and all the music I heard were hymns. Not even gospel. It was just straight hymns from the hymnbook in four-part harmony. Not even classical music. "There's Power in the Blood," "Rock of Ages"... Those sort of things. That was my first musical experience.

FRANK J. OTERI: I can still hear that in your brass voicings even to this day.

CARLA BLEY: It's really true. That sort of hung around. I found that jazz was pretty similar. The harmonies weren't that much different from the hymns. So when I made the big leap from church music to jazz, it didn't seem that much different to me.

FRANK J. OTERI: Let's talk more about that leap. I want to know more about you being a teenager and winding up working at Birdland. Those were very heady times for jazz in New York.

CARLA BLEY: Oh, I was there! I saw it all, except I got there a little after Charlie Parker. Otherwise, I saw it all, I think. God, I can't believe those days! I just wanted to hear the music and I didn't have any money. So I thought I'll just get a job there and that was so smart. That was my education. I worked at Birdland, Basin Street, the Jazz Gallery, and the Five Spot a little bit, as anything. As a cigarette girl, as a seller of stuffed animals, as a photographer with a camera around my neck... I would go up to a table and say, "Would you like a picture of you and your girlfriend." And the guy would say, "No! God!" I think I maybe took only two or three pictures the whole time I worked as a photo girl. I would just stand next to the bandstand and absorb all the music. That's where I learned everything.

FRANK J. OTERI: And you were really there at the dawn of the free jazz movement.

CARLA BLEY: I was right there. That didn't last too long.

FRANK J. OTERI: But it had repercussions in the music that have caused rifts that have still not completely healed. Nowadays, there are some folks who try to deny that this is part of jazz's history. It was a very contentious period, and you were sort of molded by that.

CARLA BLEY: I was molding it! I had the audacity to say, "Well, let's do this!" And it never worked. I don't know, we thought it was important to change. I can't imagine why I wanted to change that incredible music that I had come up on. It's just that I guess you're supposed to take things a step further, and I thought I could but of course I couldn't. Right now I think the music that happened before free jazz is the most beautiful music in jazz history. So it didn't work. But everyone uses it now as an element. I use it. Even in "The National Anthem," I set

the saxophones off doing whatever they want to do for a couple of minutes and said just play. You can do that. Everyone knows how to do that. But it's not very successful. We had to take like maybe four takes before we got anything that was listenable. Four guys that don't know each other playing for the first time with no hint of what they're doing could be very unsuccessful. One of the guys just said, "I'm gonna ruin this." And he ruined it and then it was OK.

FRANK J. OTERI: Which guy was it?

CARLA BLEY: It was Craig Handy. All of a sudden he started playing his low D-flat in a destructive manner and, oh, I was so happy because before that everybody was sort of pussy-footing around on C major and all of a sudden he did that and all of a sudden it worked!

FRANK J. OTERI: That's one of my favorite tracks on your new album, so we're going to get back to that, but we still have a lot of ground to cover before we do. So, let's go back. Here you were, a cigarette girl at Birdland. How did you get all these big important musicians to start working with you? How did you make the leap from being an onlooker of the scene to being in the center of the scene?

CARLA BLEY: That was slow. I had a gig at a coffee shop called the Phase Two—I think that's what it was called—down in Greenwich Village, and I paid guys five dollars an afternoon to work with me. And I got a lot of guys. A lot of guys needed that five! And so I remember at the time, that's when I first worked with Steve—my boyfriend, Steve Swallow.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow, it goes all the way back to then.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, he was younger than me. He was a little kid almost, and I knew him before that because he came to Basin Street with his father to hear Gene Krupa and I was the cigarette girl. And there he was with his father sitting in the front row listening to Gene Krupa. And afterwards Gene Krupa came up and talked to little Stevie Swallow and I remembered it later when Steve talked about it. I remember that little kid sitting in the front row. But I played with him for the first time when he was about 19. He was playing with my husband at that time. Then I hired him for 5 dollars to play with me. So, that's how I made the transition: money. You can buy those guys!

FRANK J. OTERI: Your influences as a composer. Who are the people you admired when you were starting out?

CARLA BLEY: Before jazz or after?

FRANK J. OTERI: Both.

CARLA BLEY: Way back, the first guy I liked was Erik Satie. Quite by accident... I had a tape recorder, a wire recorder—God, my father gave me a wire recorder... I turned on the radio and recorded the first thing I heard. It happened to be *Parade* by Satie. Then it broke. So it was the only piece I had. And I listened to it all the time.

FRANK J. OTERI: To that typewriter...

CARLA BLEY: It had a typewriter in it? You know I bought a CD of it recently. It's wonderful. I still like it.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's a piece that contains the seeds of your anything goes approach.

CARLA BLEY: It was so different from what my father was doing, you know. He was playing Rachmaninoff and that kind of stuff all the time very badly at the piano and teaching. So I heard students playing scales badly and I heard him playing Rachmaninoff badly. I got to love bad music and the Erik Satie seemed like it was pretty awful and so that was my first influence. And then I think in the jazz world, I went to hear Lionel Hampton, his Flying Home Band. I just switched over right then. That was that.

FRANK J. OTERI: So many people have written that you were influenced by Kurt Weill...

CARLA BLEY: I never heard Kurt Weill until I was in my 30s. Isn't that interesting?

FRANK J. OTERI: I hear other influences that people don't normally bring up. I hear Charles Ives in a lot of what you do.

CARLA BLEY: You know, somebody just mentioned that to me last year, and I swear I didn't hear Charles Ives until three years ago. But I think I heard it all sifted down through movie music. I must have heard some Kurt Weill. I went to *The Threepenny Opera* when I moved to New York with Michael Mantler. So I was in my 30s when I first heard that. But I must have heard some of it watered down. I think I was influenced by English Music Hall music.

FRANK J. OTERI: I can sort of hear that.

CARLA BLEY: I like that um-pah um-pah thing. I don't know why.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of jazz things, I hear a Mingus influence.

CARLA BLEY: I went every night to hear Mingus. Every single night when he was at some club in the Village because my husband was playing in the band. I would sit there and my head would go down and would come up four hours later full of music. I didn't talk to anybody. I didn't drink anything. I just listened and absorbed like a horrible sponge.

FRANK J. OTERI: In fact, Mingus released Paul Bley's very first record on Debut, his own tiny independent label.

CARLA BLEY: That's true. I forgot about that.

FRANK J. OTERI: There's another area of influence, of a musician forming an independent record label, which is something I'd like to talk with you about at length because you've not

only had success as a composer but you've also had success as an entrepreneur, running your own record company all these years. It's sort of a unique situation in this business. But we're getting ahead again...

CARLA BLEY: OK. Go back to my childhood...

FRANK J. OTERI: OK. Other influences. I even hear some Albert Ayler in what you do.

CARLA BLEY: Absolutely. He opened the door. He said it's OK to be maudlin. And I thought, "Oh, thank you, I so want to be maudlin," and that was it.

FRANK J. OTERI: But also, he created music that squeaked and squawked and was really out there, but yet at the same time there was an um-pah beat or some other sort of steadiness that a listener could hold on to. He was not afraid of being fun at the same time that he was being out.

CARLA BLEY: And that totally opened the door for me. I've got to give it to him.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of orchestration, Don Ellis... Any contact with him?

CARLA BLEY: No contact with him except that I think he worked with George Russell. I never heard anything he orchestrated. He had a big band? I gotta hear that.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's great stuff and I think it's very simpatico with the things you do.

CARLA BLEY: I did know of him through George Russell.

FRANK J. OTERI: George Russell, too, to some extent is also a kindred spirit; That "You Are My Sunshine" arrangement he did...

CARLA BLEY: That's beautiful, isn't it. I like that.

FRANK J. OTERI: The trumpeter on his first recording of that is Don Ellis.

CARLA BLEY: And the bass player is Steve Swallow.

FRANK J. OTERI: He sure is. And Sheila Jordan's singing.

CARLA BLEY: She sang that great.

FRANK J. OTERI: I'm glad we're mentioning Sheila because everybody else we've talked about so far is a guy. Being a woman composer, and more specifically, being a woman composer in jazz, who are the role models? Who were the role models back then?

CARLA BLEY: I'll answer that, but I thought you were going to say: "Everybody I mention Sheila Jordan to thinks she's great!" Have you ever met anyone who didn't like Sheila Jordan

ever? That's because she never got any measure of success like she should have gotten. She's not threatening to anyone and she's a wonderful person, so everyone adores her. But if Sheila's on the cover of *Time* magazine, people would say: "She can't sing" or "So-and-so sings better than that" and "My God, she's 70 years old." But Sheila is beloved in the whole community. Isn't that wonderful?

FRANK J. OTERI: I wish she were more known than she is, though...

CARLA BLEY: But then we would hate her... So why don't we mention women composers?

FRANK J. OTERI: Great!

CARLA BLEY: I haven't been influenced by anyone for a long time, so we'd have to go back to Duke Ellington and all that stuff. Who did that tune for Dizzy Gillespie?

FRANK J. OTERI: Mary Lou Williams?

CARLA BLEY: No, not her. "Anitra's Dance"... She was a trombone player... Melba Liston! That's a pretty good arrangement. She just took a little bit of Grieg and added stuff to it, but I love that tune. It's the only tune I ever heard. I never heard any Mary Lou Williams. I didn't have a comprehensive education; I heard who was working at the clubs. I didn't study jazz history. I didn't know who was around. It was whoever was hired by the Mafia at Birdland, that was who I learned from.

FRANK J. OTERI: And in terms of training before you got exposed to jazz? Did you train in classical music at all?

CARLA BLEY: No, I didn't. I never studied anything.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you're completely self-taught!

CARLA BLEY: No, my father taught me until I was four, or five maybe, and then my mother tried and I bit her. I bit my mother at the age of five and they gave up on me. That was it. I never learned anything else.

FRANK J. OTERI: Did you stay in contact with them later on?

CARLA BLEY: You mean after I bit her? Well, they forgave me. [laughs] They said OK, don't bite. Try not to bite!

3. Compositional Techniques and Methods

FRANK J. OTERI: So, your compositional techniques and methods as a self-trained composer...

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, as a composer, self-trained, not even trained. I didn't train myself. I'm training myself now.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of the compositional process, you were saying before that the best inspiration for you is the bathtub...

CARLA BLEY: That was more of a joke. The desk would probably be better. But, if you're stuck and take a long, hot bath, then it just might come to you. And then there's that thing when you're in bed and all of a sudden you can't sleep and you're going over and over that certain thing and you think, "Ah, that might work." The next day it usually doesn't, but in the garden you can keep singing something over and over again and maybe you'll come up with something. The bathtub is good for not only music; the bathtub is good for all sorts of life situations. Like, what should I put on the cover? Or, when should I visit the lawyer? The bathtub is good for everything. I'm a firm believer in not thinking too hard.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of structures, you talked earlier about writing a phrase that musicians would first play then improvise on and then return to, it was a little tongue-in-cheek, but clearly in all of the records of yours that I've heard there's a heck of a lot more detail in the compositions than that. What are some of the structures that you work in? Do you even think about music that way? How do you get from here to there in a composition?

CARLA BLEY: I do it like the train without railroad tracks. I just do it as I go. I have no idea how a piece is gonna go when I start. I have no idea how it's gonna end. Right now I'm working on a piece that so far has two parts. First it had one part, but then it suggested going somewhere else and I thought, "Well, I gotta lighten up a bit; this is really too heavy." So I wrote another part. I just finished it three days ago. But then I thought, "This wants to go back to the first part." So I thought maybe Part One should be Part Two, but then I thought I'd need an introduction. I just ask myself all these questions as I'm sitting there or lying in the tub. I need a third part, but what could it be? How could I get a third part? You can't have two parts. So this is my process: asking myself questions.

FRANK J. OTERI: So do you start something on paper first, or do you always start at the piano?

CARLA BLEY: Piano first. I tried writing without the piano, I tried writing on trains and those pieces are sort of short and boring. I think I like to be at the piano because I can't hear as many notes as I want to. I can sing something to myself or tap my foot, but that's not really good for an orchestra. So, it's the piano.

FRANK J. OTERI: Handwriting or computer notation...

CARLA BLEY: I use the pencil and paper.

FRANK J. OTERI: Have you tried any of the computer notation systems?

CARLA BLEY: No. My daughter takes the finished score and puts it into *Finale* and prints out the parts. This is the last five years.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you don't ever use it to hear back orchestration ideas.

CARLA BLEY: No, I don't. The only thing I do at the computer is... I'm trying to learn PhotoShop so I can do my own album covers so I don't have to farm those out to my daughter. But I don't think I can stop writing music long enough to learn a computer program right now.

FRANK J. OTERI: Believe it or not, I learned *Sibelius* over a weekend.

CARLA BLEY: Oh c'mon. Really?

FRANK J. OTERI: It's so easy. And it's been the best thing that ever happened to me as a composer, since it's not something I can do full-time. The ideas can get notated that fast and I can test them out, ear stuff back, etc. You say you've done these short pieces on the train and they never amounted to much of anything. How do you know when something is going to work? Is it when you present it to the musicians the first time?

CARLA BLEY: Oh, no. I know it's working right there by looking at it on the page. I'm never surprised.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of the arrangement and who gets assigned what voice, you know it's all going to work?

CARLA BLEY: Well, if it doesn't work at first I keep worrying about it until it works. And then I play it with Steve. I make a piano reduction and I play as much of it as I can, and Steve plays the bass part. And then sometimes he changes some of the notes and gets a better groove. I really use him. He said, "Look, I'm on call 24 hours a day. Anytime you wanna play something and see if it works, just call me. I mean, I only have to call him downstairs now, but he used to be in Connecticut. That was quite a call. And then he will play it. Usually it's OK lately, but sometimes he'll change something and then I sort of hope that he will. Sometimes the bass part is not as finished as it would be if I had just an anonymous bass player. Steve will know what to do. I think that's true.

4. Composing vs. Performing

FRANK J. OTERI: To go back in time again, back to the founding of the Jazz Composers Guild and subsequently the Jazz Composers Orchestra... From very early on in your involvement with the music, you identified yourself as a composer first. What led to that decision in your head? When did you know that you were a composer?

CARLA BLEY: Well, I never was a player. I'm still not a player. I've never had to decide between am I this or that? I've never been player. I'm working on it. I practice every day. I was always just a composer so there was no battle there to figure that one out.

FRANK J. OTERI: At the time having a collective for jazz "composers" was somewhat unusual. In jazz, the music was identified by who the performers are. It was a very brave entrepreneurial act as a composer.

CARLA BLEY: That wasn't me yet. That was mostly Cecil Taylor and Bill Dixon. Those were the guys who were the policy makers for the Jazz Composers Guild. I was just lucky to be sittin' there. They had to let me in 'cause I was a composer and I had a band at that time called the Jazz Composers Orchestra, so that's how I got in. But I just sat there and tried not to make a wave. Tried not to make Sun Ra get mad at me. It was after that that I started taking things in to my own hands, deciding I want to do this and that, but at the time I was just sitting there learning from Cecil and Bill how to do this. And I liked the idea of anarchy at that time.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, certainly, one of your earliest exposures on record was not as a leader of your own group, but as a sideman and the arranger for Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra. You were writing music that other people played on their recordings. As a composer for the last 30 years, you've been working mostly with ensembles that you have led yourself. How is that different from someone else playing your music?

CARLA BLEY: If I'm present, there's no difference. If I'm not present, it can be horrible. I know it's an honor when someone takes a piece of yours and puts their own take on it; I'm seldom happy with it 'cause I'm a control freak. But if I'm there on some sessions, and their playing my music but it's not my band, it'll turn out the way I want it to turn out. It's when I'm not there that I get worried.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's an interesting corollary to what you were saying before about your decision to work primarily with jazz musicians who pretty much will have their own identity no matter what they're playing. Whereas the goal of a classical musician's training is to reproduce the composer's intentions as faithfully as possible to bring out the composer's identity rather than their own. Ironically, so often if you write a piece for a classical ensemble, they'll rehearse it twice and maybe you'll hear it and think, "Is that what I wrote?"

CARLA BLEY: Exactly. That's happened to me too. Oh yeah! So it's more than what's on the page. It would be nice to study the page to be able to really figure out how to notate things so that people's triplets would all sound the way you wanted them to... Or people's eighth notes. In the jazz world, the difference between one and another person's eighth notes is

tremendous, and there's a lot of snobbery about it. If you don't have the right kind of eighth notes, you don't belong at all. I've only dipped into the classical world, I wrote that *Fancy Chamber Music* album, and I've worked with maybe five or six different chamber groups around the world. And if I'm there, it turns out perfect. They play great. But if I'm not there... Why don't they look at the metronome markings, give me a break! And even the jazz groups. I remember the Carnegie Hall Jazz Group whatever it's called, it's probably called orchestra...

FRANK J. OTERI: Jon Faddis's group?

CARLA BLEY: Yeah. They played a piece of mine. Two pieces. And I was too cool to be there, you know. I wasn't gonna go. It was called "Women in Jazz." I wouldn't think of going. (I forgot to answer your question!) I wouldn't think of sitting in the audience there as a woman and hearing a "Women in Jazz" concert. So I didn't go. I was only at one of the rehearsals for a half-hour; I couldn't be bothered. And I heard a recording of it after. The tempo was like forty markings off and the guys all got lost in the middle of one of the pieces and it was the just awful, the most horrible, horrible thing. 'Cause, obviously, I left and he never rehearsed it again... He rehearsed the music of the smart people who stayed and said, "Wait a minute, that's not right." or "My piece, my piece, c'mon!" I didn't do that. I just left. I always do that. You can't do that no matter what kind of music you write. You have to be there, 'cause notation isn't a sure thing yet.

FRANK J. OTERI: So...

CARLA BLEY: ...I've got one more thing to say! I've just heard a collection of player piano music where the player did not have to be there. And exactly where the player played those notes, the holes got punched in, and it sound like the person's there. So that's the answer. You would never believe what this is. It's the Zelinsky Collection from the Cliff House in San Francisco. It's not just player piano...

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh, the Musee Mecanique. I love that place. And you've titled one of my favorite records of yours *Musique Mecanique*.

CARLA BLEY: That's where I got the idea. I thought from my memory was that all those machines were broken. You'd put in your nickel and the bow wouldn't go across the strings. It would go across the wood at the end instead. And the cymbals: the two hands would miss. And that was what I loved about it. That it was totally wrong and broken. But I just got this CD from my cousin who remembered that I used to go there all the time, and I played it all the way through and the music is excellent. It's like some human being played that music. Do you know the mechanical process?

FRANK J. OTERI: I saw a whole demonstration of how mechanical instruments work when I was at the Nationaal Museum in Utrecht, which is one of the world's largest collections of musical automata. So this is interesting that you say that you'd like to get your music across this way. You've never worked with electronic instruments that much. You've used a synthesizer on some of the early records, though not in a long time. You've never done an album by yourself alone in the studio. It seems that for you it's always about people.

CARLA BLEY: Oh, I don't like people. That's not why I do it. I use people 'cause I have to. They add so much to the expression. I wouldn't want to be that expressive on stage. I prefer to keep a low profile. My trombone player could play five notes I wrote on a page and give it 5000% more importance than I could if I played it.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's so funny to hear you say this. I've never heard you live and I really want to. But from all the albums I've heard and your record covers and promo photos and all the photos you usually include of the recording sessions in the booklets that come with your recordings, I've always gotten the sense that you exude so much personality when you're playing or at least you seem to be always having such a good time.

CARLA BLEY: No, isn't that strange. Maybe if there are a lot of people on the stage. I'm listening to them and they're knocking me out. I've got a great seat right on stage. But I don't feel that I've creating that excitement, it's the guys I choose. It is me in a far-fetched way since I chose these guys and their playing their hearts out. But that's not what I look to do. I like to be quiet and be by myself and sit at the desk or the piano alone.

5. Enjoying Independence

FRANK J. OTERI: Let's get to the entrepreneurial stuff...

CARLA BLEY: That stage.

FRANK J. OTERI: WATT Records... First of all, what does WATT mean?

CARLA BLEY: My second husband called it WATT. That's the meaning...

FRANK J. OTERI: But what does it mean?

CARLA BLEY: It means three different things. The Watts Towers in Los Angeles. It meant Samuel Beckett's novel *WATT*. And it meant "Watt the hell was that?" WATT! It meant three things and so he called it WATT.

FRANK J. OTERI: I'm glad I asked 'cause I thought it had another meaning altogether. I was totally wrong.

CARLA BLEY: What did you think?

FRANK J. OTERI: Watt is a unit of electricity.

CARLA BLEY: Oh, isn't that great! Yes, that too!

FRANK J. OTERI: O.K.!

CARLA BLEY: Four meanings...

FRANK J. OTERI: And now Steve's stuff is on a label called XtraWATT.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah. Xtra. My publishing company is called Alrac. I sorta like those rude sounding words.

FRANK J. OTERI: What does Alrac mean?

CARLA BLEY: It's Carla backwards.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh, of course.

CARLA BLEY: But it's got that Al-rac! It's not "Celestial Harmonies" or something. And WATT is sort of a short stubby word. Xtra is a cheap word, misspelled. I sorta like that. I don't like anything too fancy.

FRANK J. OTERI: OK, so the first record you put out on your own is the massive, massive three-LP "Chronotransduction," as you called it, now that's a big word. What on earth does that mean?

CARLA BLEY: That means time travel. I didn't make it up; it was made up by a scientist.

FRANK J. OTERI: That is such an unusual recording. I listened again last night. It's amazing. But I don't know what to say about it. There's so much stuff going on in it, so many different kinds of music. One minute you think you're listening to a jazz record and then it turns into a field recording from somewhere in the Caucasus or it's a rock record or a Broadway musical...

CARLA BLEY: Wow. Yeah. Well, I didn't know what I was supposed to do so I did whatever came up. Anyone who wanted to be in that opera, I said "Fine. You can be in it." I wasn't picky about the kinds of music or the people.

FRANK J. OTERI: You consider it an opera but it existed for years as only this recording. About 10 years ago there was a stage production somewhere in Germany.

CARLA BLEY: There were 5 productions. Afterward we toured in France and did the whole summer festival circuit with the live *Escalator Over The Hill*.

FRANK J. OTERI: Is there a video of that anywhere? I'd love to see it.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, I'll give you one.

FRANK J. OTERI: Please, it's fascinating. I don't know if you're familiar with the theatre works of Richard Foreman, but it strikes me...

CARLA BLEY: Oh! He is so great. I just love him!

FRANK J. OTERI: Maybe it's the musical sensibility of Richard Foreman? It's so out there, but it's fun.

CARLA BLEY: I could never hook up with him. He's not a very friendly guy. [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: No [laughs].

CARLA BLEY: Once I cut my fur coat in two and gave him half. We both had the same kind of a strange fur coat made from an Australian animal. Maybe it was a wallaby or something, I forget. I got mine at a thrift shop and I'm sure he did, too. It was the ugliest fur coat you've ever seen, but it was really warm. We both had one. Every time we met at a cultural affair we just looked at each other sideways. Once I saw him without his coat and I said, what happened to your coat? He said it just totally fell apart. I loved him so much that I cut my coat down the middle of the back, put half of it in a box, and sent it to his studio. Then I never heard from him. Next time I saw him he never mentioned it. But when I was thinking about *Escalator Over The Hill*, people were saying to me that I have to do it with this director; they'd name one after the

other. I said I want to do it with Richard Foreman. He probably wouldn't want to do it. It's unrequited.

FRANK J. OTERI: That is so interesting. I heard the connection immediately.

CARLA BLEY: Wow, that's so clever. You've caught on to a couple of things that I didn't even know about. Strange.

FRANK J. OTERI: So that came out, which predates the WATT label but was also a self-produced thing. You have a unique position in the record business. You've got your own independent label, WATT. It's distributed by another independent label, ECM, which in turn is distributed by a major conglomerate. I mean, they keep going from one to another: BMG, before that Warner Brothers, now they're with Universal. They keep hopping, but they always have a major distributing them, which means they'll be at every Tower Records, Blockbuster, or where have you. You get to have your cake and eat it, too.

CARLA BLEY: Tell me about it!

FRANK J. OTERI: You're an indie within an indie, distributed by a major. It's a very envious position to be in.

CARLA BLEY: And I'm totally protected. I never have to meet those guys at the top. All I have to do is be nice to Manfred [laughs].

FRANK J. OTERI: Many of the members of the American Music Center, which puts out NewMusicBox, and a lot of our readers are composers—classical music composers, jazz composers, composers of all types of what I like to call "dot org" music: non-commercial music—most of us are self-published. We put out our own scores. We're self-producing in terms of making recordings because that's the way it is. The majors aren't interested in this stuff. They're interested in something that they can sell in 2 weeks and milk to death, but they're not interested in something that has an independent voice—as you said, the gunpowder tea of music.

CARLA BLEY: How long have you been doing that?

FRANK J. OTERI: The Center has been around since 1939.

CARLA BLEY: Oh! I was going to say that this was in the last 30 years that this has been happening. Before then I think if you wrote something that a label or whatever didn't want, you would disappear from view.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, it's very true. Sun Ra was one of the earliest people putting out stuff on his own label. Mingus...

CARLA BLEY: Mingus, Stan Kenton...

FRANK J. OTERI: Stan Kenton, and Harry Partch.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, Harry Partch. Isn't that amazing that nobody wanted that? Wow!

FRANK J. OTERI: Now when you look back on it, everybody wants all of those people.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: And a lot of people who were put out by the majors at that time have been completely forgotten. How many people listen to Curtis Counce at this point?

CARLA BLEY: I don't even know who that is.

FRANK J. OTERI: This is the stuff being put out by major jazz labels at that time.

CARLA BLEY: Oh, I remember at the time, when I was with New Music Distribution Service, going to all the executives at the major labels and saying, "Look, we're your work for you. It's like a farm. We've got these young, weird looking forms of life. We're distributing them. Why don't you give us some money to help us do it? Because as soon as they're ready, you can take them away from us for no charge whatsoever. Just throw a little money in the fertilizer." I never got a cent from any of them. Yet now, luckily, all those weird looking trees survived. Not all of them I'm sure, but most of them. Turns out they get them anyway. They can discard them or cut them down—to continue the tree metaphor—chop them down and burn them...

FRANK J. OTERI: Turn them into McDonald's paper hamburger wrappers.

CARLA BLEY: Exactly!

6. New Music Distribution Service

FRANK J. OTERI: Let's talk about New Music Distribution Services. How did that get started?

CARLA BLEY: That got started because Mike and I had made our own recordings, two for JCOA by that time. Mike's album was called the *Jazz Composers Orchestra* and mine was *Escalator Over The Hill*. What do you do with them once you have them? Do you pile them up in your living room or something? You've got to get them distributed. We quickly found out that you have to get these things distributed. How are we going to do that? No distributor is going to want them because we don't have any reputation. So we got together with 10 different labels that we knew about. I believe they were all European at the time. In England it was Incus. In Germany it was FMP and ECM, Futura in France. It was all these people like us: weird people who got their own money together and made their own strange recordings.

FRANK J. OTERI: And it wasn't just jazz. It was also contemporary music. Lovely Music was a part of that early on.

CARLA BLEY: That was later. This all started with jazz because that was the only people we knew at that point. There were maybe 10 of us, and we distributed each other's records. We did this for a couple of years for free. If we have a new record we would send it to all these countries. If they had a new record out they would send it to us. We would each try to distribute them as best as possible: to stores or to friends, take out ads, whatever. We did this for no money, but we soon realized we couldn't do it. We were losing money. We weren't in the position where we could lose money. The musicians can't lose money! So we started charging a quarter for every record we distributed. And then it went up to 50 cents. There was a lot of theft going on. The people who would store our records stole them and sold them to other people. By the time NMDS finally collapsed, we were charging \$1.80. We kept saying how much do we need to cover ourselves?

FRANK J. OTERI: I haven't heard this version of the demise of NMDS. The version I always heard when I was a teenager, when Tower Records had just opened and I went down to the New Music Distribution shop in SoHo a few times—I bought my first Alvin Lucier LP there, might have bought some of my first free jazz albums there—and I was told that NMDS fell apart because of the rise of the CD. All these people turned around and returned the LPs, they were flooded by product that they couldn't get rid of, and that killed them.

CARLA BLEY: No, I never heard that. I could tell you more about that but it wouldn't be interesting to your readers.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's completely interesting.

CARLA BLEY: Really?

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh yes, it is.

CARLA BLEY: You know, Timothy Marquand, who was the head or president of JCOA, was just here 2 days ago, and we talked about all this, so it's fresh in my mind. I think it started going under when our office manager got sick. We didn't fire him because he was really sick, and then he died. During the time that he was sick he didn't pay the New York State taxes. By the time we found out about it, the taxes were big—more than we could handle. So when the board that we had gotten together to help NMDS found out that the taxes weren't paid, everyone quit within one second. I was there at the meeting... I quit, I quit, I quit, I quit, I quit, get my coat, my umbrella, out the door. It was just like bam! I think it was hundreds of thousands of dollars...

FRANK J. OTERI: Who was liable?

CARLA BLEY: The board members! That's why they had to quit!

FRANK J. OTERI: So once there was no board, the State never got the money?

CARLA BLEY: Yes, we've been paying it back ever since, along with the musicians and everyone else. So the illness of our office manager was one of the things that happened. After him we got another office manager who was really not the right person. That person was more into world music than into jazz and classical music. They would say, let's take the money from the sale of the Chick Corea album and buy 20 recordings of this African tribe that nobody ever heard of, or something. And I said wait a minute, we're looking after our own first. We can't look after other kinds of music, you know. By that time we were even doing rock 'n' roll. We were doing anybody that knew about us, who needed us, and was doing—I guess it was called—new music.

FRANK J. OTERI: New, independent...

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, new music. We wanted to stick with new music and not do world music. A lot of it was traditional. I think that was the excuse. We just couldn't get bigger. But this guy was just mostly interested in that. We'd get salesmen who would call and say if you take 10 of this, I'll give you 20 of those cheaper. By that time we were charging \$3 an album or something—like whatever Sam Goody would pay or something. We were no bargain. The only thing we were the bargain to were the musicians because we accepted anyone. That was what set us apart. You have an album that you want distributed... sure! Whatever it is! It doesn't have a cover? No problem! We don't need a cover. It doesn't have a number? Can you put a number on it? You don't want a number on it? Well, okay! Then we took all these...

FRANK J. OTERI: You took the earliest Glenn Branca and Sonic Youth records.

CARLA BLEY: Yup, and Philip Glass. We were his first distributor. We did Laurie Anderson, Gil Scott Heron. Whenever someone had a hit we'd just fire 'em. We'd say you don't need us anymore. Come on, give the other guys a break.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's kind of like Moe Asch's philosophy of Folkways. Once he had a hit record he'd say, some other label take it off of me please, I'm not interested!

CARLA BLEY: That's exactly what we did because we couldn't be swamped by things. Like Chick Corea's *Return to Forever*: we said that's it, we can't do it.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you did stuff on majors then because that was Warner Brothers.

CARLA BLEY: It wasn't at that point. No, it couldn't have been.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh, earlier on his stuff was on ECM.

CARLA BLEY: It must have been on ECM. Yes, it was on ECM. We did ECM. We were ECM's distributor in the early days. And now they're my distributors.

FRANK J. OTERI: That is so interesting. How did that change happen?

CARLA BLEY: Oh that's too long! My life is too long! We could never fit this in. Ay ay ay.

FRANK J. OTERI: This is an important piece of the puzzle.

CARLA BLEY: Okay, ECM was one of those original 10 that we distributed—we, as in we all distributed each others', we were all equal. ECM had a couple of big sellers, which was the problem with ECM.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, the Cologne concert, Keith Jarrett.

CARLA BLEY: No, we didn't do it by then. I don't think we were distributing them at that time. Anyway, Michael Mantler, my second husband, and I decided that we were too big for the New Music Distribution Service. We were selling too many records. We needed another distributor because it wasn't fair. It seemed like we were doing NMDS for our own purposes. We were very high-minded, noble people, you know. I wasn't just that we wanted to get famous or something. We were at a studio in London doing overdubs with Julie Tippetts for my album *Tropic Appetites* and Richard Branson came by. He wasn't a big-time back then, just some rich kid.

FRANK J. OTERI: He didn't have the airline yet?

CARLA BLEY: [laughs] No, he didn't have the airline. He did have Virgin Records and he came by and said that he would like to distribute *Escalator Over the Hill*. I said, okay. You know I'll distribute yours, too, if you want. And we said, okay. We were sort of thinking that we were going to have to leave NMDS. So, we were distributed by Virgin for about 3 years. I started getting interested in business at the point. I would go to the sales meetings with all the salespeople there and I'd give a little speech about the whole ECM catalog and the WATT catalog because I think he was distributing ECM at that time. But then Richard fired me. I don't know why. I got really mad at him and I said, you can't fire me, or something. I chased him around room. I remember I chased him up into the rafters of his house. He was crouched on the rafters up in the attic and I was screaming at him from below. Finally, I realized he was

serious and no longer wanted to distribute JCOA and ECM anymore. He was more into the reggae stuff at that point. So I felt terrible. Within one hour ECM picked it up and said, we'll distribute it. I don't recall how ECM fit into all this, but within an hour they became our distributor and JCOA's distributor, too.

FRANK J. OTERI: Terrific! Now your situation, which has been successful for you over 30 years, versus being signed to, say, Sony, or being signed to Verve, or being signed to Blue Note—would you want to be on those labels?

CARLA BLEY: Oh, not now, but of course I did at that point. I used to go around to Teo Macero at Columbia, or Nesuhi Ertegun at Atlantic, or Frances Wolf at Blue Note—I had my presentation together and my tapes together. And they said, look, there's no market for this, we can't do it, very sorry. Finally we had to start it ourselves. We started the Jazz Composers Orchestra and *Escalator Over the Hill*. We fundraised ourselves: made every penny, put ourselves deep into hock, and made rich people give us money. That's how we did it. After that point I got interested in that and I didn't want to leave the outcome of my life up to anyone else. I thought I'd rather be my own director. I wouldn't want to be dropped. A lot of people have been dropped. If I were to be dropped! I would be horrified if I got dropped from something. That time I did get dropped—the distribution by Virgin—that was a horrifying moment, but that was the only time that has really happened.

FRANK J. OTERI: But now you have a product that is completely yours, and no one can take it out of print.

CARLA BLEY: No, ECM just keeps it all in print. They could put it out of print.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you have your own label, you could take it somewhere else.

CARLA BLEY: I would take it somewhere else.

FRANK J. OTERI: You own it.

CARLA BLEY: Boy, am I in a good situation, huh? It's really great. Wow!

7. Some Great Records

FRANK J. OTERI: Getting back to some of the music, I want to talk about some of my favorite things of yours. I know we're jumping back into the past again, but then we're going to jump back into the future. I love *Musique Mekanique*. That album features an extremely young Eugene Chadbourne. He's really made a name for himself with electric rake and all his crazy country experiments.

CARLA BLEY: Shockabilly.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah. But I think that record with you is his earliest recording.

CARLA BLEY: No, we distributed one of his records at NMDS.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah?

CARLA BLEY: He put out his own record.

FRANK J. OTERI: So that's how you found him.

CARLA BLEY: No. I found him at a concert in Toronto. A painter friend of mine, Mark Snow, said, you got to hear this guitar player, you'll just love him. I went, and I just loved him. It was at a gallery. It wasn't even a club.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's a very, very unique record on many levels.

CARLA BLEY: Terry Adams... wasn't that amazing? I met him because he came to a Jazz Composers Orchestra session and said, I recorded one of your tunes. He was this weird, wonderful guy from Kentucky. I was really surprised. I just put in everybody I knew at that point.

FRANK J. OTERI: Soon after that record you put out a whole series of records with a pretty much consistent group of people. Getting back to an earlier thread we were talking about, how do you get the sounds that you want out of a group of people? Your response was you have to be there. But you had a pretty tight regular group—Roswell Rudd and Steve... There was a definite group of people who played together. The people who were on the Europe '77 tour album.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's a very, very tight sound.

CARLA BLEY: Well, that had nothing to do with me. They had their own sound. I used them. That was the end of it. My choice to use them was the creation of the sound because they wouldn't sound like anything I would want them to sound like if they didn't sound like that in the

first place. Those people wouldn't do that or they couldn't do that. You just choose. You hire the sound that you want.

FRANK J. OTERI: How big of an ensemble can you have sound that tight?

CARLA BLEY: *Escalator Over The Hill*—I'll give you a video of the live concert—was great!

FRANK J. OTERI: How many players total?

CARLA BLEY: I used about 35 something.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's big!

CARLA BLEY: They sounded perfect!

FRANK J. OTERI: I know on the recording that there are different people on each track. It wasn't the same consistent group.

CARLA BLEY: That's true, and it was recorded over the period of years—many different sessions, many different locations.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of a touring group, a more recent record that I love is *Big Band Theory*. In that group you have something like 9 horns on there: 5 trumpets, French horns—maybe 10 horns—trombones...

CARLA BLEY: No, that was *Fleur Carnivore* with a 10-horn band. The others are standard big bands.

FRANK J. OTERI: There's a lot of brass.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: There are voicings on there with moments that feel like that entire brass section is moving like a single line. I think the only other time I heard brass sound that tight was on Willie Colón salsa records from the early '70s.

CARLA BLEY: Wow!

FRANK J. OTERI: I mean I *love* how tight that group is!

CARLA BLEY: Thank you! I didn't know that was unusual at all.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think it is.

CARLA BLEY: I'm so thrilled. Wow, it's great. I'm just sitting here thinking about it. [pauses] Mmmm. I don't know why.

FRANK J. OTERI: Did you tour with them a lot before it was recorded? Or did that happen in the studio and then you toured with it? What's the process?

CARLA BLEY: The process has been, until this last album, to do a tour and record sometime during the tour. Two thirds of the way through is usually best because it would cost a fortune to go into a New York studio and hire guys—like I just did. So I always did these things either live, or at a studio when we had just a couple days off. There was not much that I could control with planning that. I had the band together so I didn't have to worry about someone not being able to make it, or having to go home early or something. I had those guys. They were in my band. They were in my bus and in my hotel. I got to do whatever I wanted with them for the duration of the tour, so that how I made all my albums.

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you record all the gigs on the tour?

CARLA BLEY: No, definitely not. Well, if it's a small group maybe we can record—like the duo things where we recorded 10 different gigs. But this last album, *Looking For America*, I said, I want to make an album with the best New York musicians, I want to make it at the best New York studio, and I want to have a rehearsal in advance, which is something! God, who gets rehearsals? You know, I want to rehearse! Maybe I'll have two rehearsals. I'm going to save my money and do it. And I did it. So, finally I have a studio recording with great musicians. But I think it pretty much sounds like my other albums.

8. *Looking for America*

FRANK J. OTERI: It does! I want to talk about *Looking for America*; it's what put you back on my immediate radar again. I called Tina Pelikan over at ECM and said, I have to talk to Clara Bley next week! This record is just too good!

CARLA BLEY: I bet she likes that! [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: I think it's so exciting because this album is so deceptively mainstream. Yet, it's so out there if you really listen into the details of what's happening. In a way I think it's the most—hyperbole again but I can't help it, I love this record—amazing political statement, and there are no words. I adore what you've done with "The National Anthem." Here you have the National Anthem and then chords change and it goes off-kilter: it's like something has gone wrong with America, and you can hear that! I think it's funny there is a disclaimer on the record.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah. [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: I don't know, am I right? Is this a political record?

CARLA BLEY: I don't know what to say but thank you! [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: [laughs]

CARLA BLEY: I started writing this 3 years ago and it wasn't a political record at all. In fact by the time all this stuff happened with this country and George Bush got elected, this record was half-way finished. So, it wasn't a political record. On the other hand, was I ever happy with anything? No, I always thought America needed a little bit of work. I mean it was a criticism of America, but it wasn't about what has gone on recently. I think if I had written about that it would have been a horrible, deadly serious, sad album. I was still poking fun and waxing sentimental.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting because the album harkens back—you've played around with the National Anthem back in 1977...

CARLA BLEY: Oh yeah, all the time. I was always a troublemaker, being politically provocative in some way even though I didn't know what I was talking about. I always did that. The day Reagan got elected I quickly wrote an arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner* on the bus in a minor key and we played it at the concert that night. I was always criticizing and complaining.

FRANK J. OTERI: There are some other things on the album that I think are so wonderful: your use of the brass to sound like a traffic jam...

CARLA BLEY: Oh, wasn't that great? I must admit, I think that was so good! Ah, I can't believe that was so good. I originally thought that I'd ask the percussionist to bring some child's toys—I need horns in this. I wrote the piece first without horns in it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Really?

CARLA BLEY: Yeah. I mean not without horns, but without the traffic noises. It was just [sings]. It was just this fast piece.

FRANK J. OTERI: Almost Bebop sounding.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah. Then the horns came in a bit later and I thought, oh, I have to get some horns and sirens from the percussionists. By the end of the tour I was telling them to layout because the brass sounded so good. I think that was one of my best moments—making the brass be horns—that was really nice.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's pretty great. Also the Latin tinges all over the record are really interesting. At times it grooves. It almost feels like there are montunos.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, thank you again. But you know that's because America is more than half Latin. I mean this is huge two-continental country. Latin music is so pervasive. When I was a kid in Oakland, California, my best friend was Mexican. In New York, there are all kinds of Latin music things. It's a big influence in jazz in general. It's American music!

FRANK J. OTERI: Of course, having Don Alias on there is just amazing.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, he's worked with me for a long time.

FRANK J. OTERI: Upcoming projects?

CARLA BLEY: July 1st we'll be at the University of Minnesota.

FRANK J. OTERI: With the quartet?

CARLA BLEY: No, with the big band.

9. Promotion

FRANK J. OTERI: This is one of the things I want to say about promotion. In the classical music world, and similarly in the jazz world, with these large ensembles you'll be rehearsing stuff, then you'll be touring it, and then you'll record it when it's hot, then the record is out and that's it.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: You know a rock band will do an album and tour to promote the album. How do you promote the album once it's the past?

CARLA BLEY: You play the same music.

FRANK J. OTERI: But the groups don't normally stay together. It's rare.

CARLA BLEY: You think?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, it's rare in both classical music and jazz. They're already onto the next thing.

CARLA BLEY: Maybe the people who are listening to it aren't listening to the individual musicians. Maybe they're just listening to the composer, or listening to the music, or something. As long as you play the same tunes...

FRANK J. OTERI: Even if it's a different group.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, but it wouldn't be that different would it? I mean in my case I'm bringing the Iridium band to Minneapolis, with the exception of 4 guys.

FRANK J. OTERI: So the Iridium band is going to be the big band, not the quartet you were talking about earlier, right?

CARLA BLEY: No, no. That's next. We're going to be doing the same thing. We're going to record the first tour of the quartet, and then we will tour the following year to promote the album.

FRANK J. OTERI: Great.

CARLA BLEY: See, this is how we do it in this world. It's nice.

FRANK J. OTERI: The ideal way to get this music heard—this stuff doesn't get played on the radio a lot, radio is afraid of this stuff...

CARLA BLEY: Well, I don't blame them. I listen to NPR a lot. When there is a music show I have to go do something else for a half an hour. I'm really not crazy about listening to music

because my head had music in it already. I might listen to a talk show or something, but I don't know if I would want to listen to music on the radio. So I don't blame them for not playing...

FRANK J. OTERI: So how do people find your music?

CARLA BLEY: They read about it in the magazines; they maybe hear it on the radio [laughs]; they know about other albums the artist has made and want to check out the artist's new album because they think it might be interesting to revisit that person again—all of those things.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the most amazing tools that you have—I don't know if it's so much a promotional tool because it's so tongue-and-cheek and so funny—is your website.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: That website is amazing.

CARLA BLEY: Thank you.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's like no other website I've been to for a composer.

CARLA BLEY: Thank you. It's not serious. We try not to sell things on it, but lately we have been stooping to that.

FRANK J. OTERI: [laughs]

CARLA BLEY: When my daughter and I originally stated it, we wanted it to be hard to find and that my name would not occur—people would just stumble upon it. We wanted to make it difficult. And when you finally find it, you can't do what you want to do.

FRANK J. OTERI: You have to go to the receptionist first. [laughs]

CARLA BLEY: Then if you don't type in the right thing you can't go visit me in my cell, oh no.

FRANK J. OTERI: You wind up in the showers or somewhere.

CARLA BLEY: Yeah, we tried to make it hard for everybody because we were so tired of the sales game. Why sell something all the time? Why not give people something they can't have and refuse to sell it to them. Maybe we backed off of that a bit now with all that music for sale in the library. Otherwise, all the lead sheets can be downloaded for free. We didn't want to make money off of it. Strange.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's tremendous. It's a beautiful thing.

CARLA BLEY: And you still can't find it, right? How did you find it? Oh, someone told you about it.

FRANK J. OTERI: If you go to Google now and search on your name it's one of the first things that pops up.

CARLA BLEY: Really? I have to change that.

FRANK J. OTERI: [laughs] You can't!

CARLA BLEY: Argh!

FRANK J. OTERI: I have to confess that we have a link to the site that is online every May 11th, on your birthday. We put composers' birthdays on our homepage.

CARLA BLEY: Oh, wow. So, a lot of composers have websites now?

FRANK J. OTERI: Tons.

CARLA BLEY: Do you have one?

FRANK J. OTERI: Not as a composer because I'm so busy doing NewMusicBox, but I probably will in the not so distant future.

CARLA BLEY: Watch out because it's a time eater.

FRANK J. OTERI: I know. Is there anything we missed here that you want to talk about?

CARLA BLEY: Nope. No [yawns], I'm tired of talking!

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