

Marshall Allen- I've Never Been A Hundred Before

By Ken Weiss

Marshall Belford Allen (b. May 25, 1924, Louisville, KY) the legendary, longtime leader of the iconic Sun Ra Arkestra (since 1995) and 2025 NEA Jazz Master turned 100 the month prior to this extensive interview done on June 30, 2025, at his home - the famous "Sun Ra House" on Morton Street - a three-story rowhouse in Philadelphia's Germantown neighborhood which serves as the terrestrial headquarters of the Arkestra. Allen was accompanied by his son, Ronnie Boyd, who added his own occasional insights during the session.

Cadence: *You turned 100 years old last month. What does passing the 100-year mark mean to you?*

Marshall Allen: I don't know, a hundred? That's good. All I know is I've never been a hundred before [Laughs] so I'm starting a new page. I ain't worrying about nothing, I know what I have to do and I do it whether I like it or not. I'm not worrying about those things I used to worry about. There ain't nothing to worry about. I worry about my health but most of the time I feel good. I feel like I've always felt except I don't do as much work.

Cadence: *To many who have followed your 80-year career of traveling the world, spreading the joyful music of Sun Ra and your own music, you've long been a national treasure. The fact that you are 100 years old and still performing at such a high level is downright fantastical and inspiring. Would you talk about keeping this going at age 100?*

Allen: My brother Nathan was 103 when he passed.

Cadence: *So you're not impressed with your age?*

Allen: No, I feel alright. I still have the energy to play although I don't have all the energy to do all the painting and decorating [around the house that I used to]. That's what I've done on the side - paint, fix and decorate, and other housework like that. I don't do much of that now because when I get on the ladder I get a little [off]. I still do some areas where I don't have to get on the ladder. I've painted all nine of the radiators and I've got to do all of them again.

Cadence: *When did you stop doing all the housework?*

Allen: When I almost fell off the ladder.

Cadence: *Once you hit 90 and beyond and kept touring, your age became a prominent entry into the articles written about you and the band. Do you think too much has been made of your age?*

Allen: I still have my energy, and when you have your energy, it doesn't matter how old you are. If you still have your spirit, you get up and go. Yeah, it's too

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Houston Person - Photo credit © Ken Weiss

Interview: Marshall Allen

much talk about my age. I don't feel too bad for a hundred. I still do the same things I've always done, just not as much of it.

Cadence: *What advice do you have for the rest of us mere mortals regarding the secret of longevity?*

Allen: It's from playing the music for my well-being so I can give something to the people. So when it comes to be that I don't do it for my well-being, then I'll have nothing to give to the people. My idea was to do the music, do the thing that you really feel and give it to the people who really need the music. So if it don't do me no good, why should I give it to you? You see? I had to turn my life around a little bit. I turned it around and said, 'I'm going into the music only' in order for my well-being to keep me happy and strong and working so that I can give something to others when I play. But when it gets to where I don't do nothing, I'll have nothing to give. You see? That must be doing something because I'm still playing, I still want to play. Everybody says don't do this, don't do that, but I can still [claps hands] get down the road yet. [Laughs]

Cadence: *When did you turn your life around?*

Allen: I did it when I buried myself into the music and really tried to get the spirit and not do what I knew because what I knew was the condition I was in. So I said, 'I don't know nothing, I'm gonna do things by the spirit because when you "know," you go in the box. Sun Ra used to say that and I didn't quite understand it but he was talking about the mirror and the spirit. So I said, 'Now what I have to do is learn what he's talking about' because you believe it or you don't believe it. I had to convince myself to try it, to do the music for my well-being. I wanted it to keep me strong and don't break down and don't do a lot of things that will take your energy and stuff away. So I stopped doing all these things that I was doing when I was young and turned around to the music for my well-being. That called for some discipline because you have to cast out a lot of stuff you're doing in life and concentrate there, like any profession. When you put your mind into what you do you're gonna get the benefits, and it's got to help you before you can give people anything. So the message I give is the music keeps my well-being so I'll give you some, and if you're really sincere about that, and listen to the music, it can heal many of the different things that bother people.

Cadence: *Would you talk about what the listeners should be getting from the music?*

Allen: They're getting my well-being and my interpretation of a better feeling when you hear music and different sounds that you don't usually hear. So, I'll give you my well-being, you see? Otherwise, I wouldn't play music. It keeps me alive and energetic; that's what the music's supposed to do. I had to cast out all the other things that I'd been doing and concentrate just on the music. Sounds, sound body, sound mind, that's what they always told me, so I said, 'I'm gonna use sound,' but I had to be sincere about it, it ain't no joke. So I took

Interview: Marshall Allen



Marshall Allen and Sun Ra Arkestra - Photo credit © Ken Weiss

Interview: Marshall Allen

the third floor up there [Points up the steps of the house] and all the activity down here is down [here] and I'm upstairs doing my music, getting my well-being and understanding the music and what it means. It's kept me right on through my nineties with no feeling of being old or tired.

Cadence: Talk about longevity in your family.

Allen: My father went away in his 90s. My mother went away in her 90s. My brother went away in his 100s.

Cadence: You also had 6 sisters?

Allen: Yeah, they're all gone except for one who is 89 and she's kind of fragile. At 89, I was rolling because of the music.

Cadence: You have this longevity in your family, have you lived your life with the expectancy of longevity?

Allen: No, I never thought about it, I didn't look at it that way. I'd say, 'I'm alright, I'm 80,' 'I'm 90, I'm alright,' and 'I'm 100, I'm still alright.' There's been some little bumps along the way. I hope I keep my brain straight and keep the music. I'm always doing the music because it's healing to me. I took the music and all the confusion in life went away, it don't matter. I don't worry about nothing. I used to be a clean freak – everything I'd clean – because my family was like that. If you dropped a dirty sock on the floor you wouldn't see it anymore. They'd wash it or throw it in the trash. Clean freaks – that's what I call it. [Laughs]

Cadence: We're doing this interview at your home – the "Sun Ra House?" – and your son Ronnie is here. Would you talk about your children? How many do you have and what do they do?

Allen: [Looks at Ronnie and asks him to explain what he does]

Ronnie Boyd: I'm in the pharmaceutical industry. I sell products that treat patients that have head and neck cancer. My product is a pegfilgrastim so patients that are receiving chemotherapy infusions, my drug comes after and increases their white blood cell count. I've been in corporate America for 20 years and married for 30 years with 3 beautiful children. My siblings from my father, there are 5 of us. The oldest is Rodney. The next is, we call him "Strob" but his name is David. The next is Tina and then me and the youngest is little Marshall. They do a variety of different tasks. Little Marshall works for the city of Philadelphia. Rodney is retired but one thing to note, he's a great pianist. He's picked up the skill of playing music similar to our father. He's an incredible pianist who lives in Chicago. I think he has played with bands when he was coming up but he doesn't play anymore like that.

Cadence: Ronnie, you live in Florida but you come to Philadelphia often.

Ronnie Boyd: I come up each month to take my father to his medical appointments, make sure he's doing okay and spend time with him. I talk to him about our family history, about life, about his well-being, my well-being. So there's a bond we've created over the years that we have. I make sure that if he needs something, that I'm on the front line delivering that. For example, I

Interview: Marshall Allen



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just recently bought him another air conditioner for his room.

Cadence: *Ronnie, would you say something about being the son of Marshall Allen, having such a famous father?*

Ronnie Boyd: I think I see things differently. Yes, I think it's an honor to be able to have a father who has played music for so long, that has given his life to music, and, like he said earlier, how he is playing for his well-being, so when he plays for his well-being, we all benefit from that. I think it's kind of weird as his son, because I have to share him with the world. Usually when there's a father-son relationship, there's an intimacy but I had to realize that I'm sharing my dad with the world. But one thing is for sure, others can never love him like me as his son. The love that I have goes beyond what others might feel because there's a blood bond, there's a physical bond, an emotional bond, and at the end – that's my father. It's a weird dichotomy because he's my father. He's been doing what he's been doing for all these years, and I respect it, so I want to see to it that he continues to do it and do it in a healthy manner, but I have to share him with others. It's not always easy to do but I get to build my memories and moments with him. When I am around him it's him and I and nobody else interrupts that, which is nice.

Cadence: *Marshall, when I interviewed you 10 years ago for Jazz Inside, I asked you to describe yourself and you answered with – “I’m just somebody who likes to play music. I found something that I wanted to do and I found a band that I liked and wanted to be in.” Would you expand on that?*

Allen: You know, if you study and you're ready, if you find the [right place] and you expand yourself by having your own thing, that's the way it is. So you study hard and you get yourself together, but that [applies] to everybody. I stay at my post and I cast out a lot of other stuff that takes you away from it. It takes a lot of discipline to stay with the music. That was a big choice and one day I just said, 'I'm going that way,' and I just shut off half of the house in order to do it. Nobody comes up and bothers me. Do whatever you do downstairs; I'm upstairs with my music. I knew I needed to play more instruments to understand how to write for them. I try to play them; I don't play them too good but I play them to understand how they're played. I've got about 20 instruments up there. I've got oboe, piccolo, flutes, clarinet, contrabass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, and a bunch of keyboards. All of these things help me write what I want, what I feel, and I can give everybody parts. I've got trumpet, trombone, I've got all that stuff. I play on the piano and organ and I've got a little bass. I bought some drums over there. I play a little bit on every instrument so when I write for it, I can hear it. There's also the kora. I've always liked the kora and I have one. When I was in Paris, there were a lot of kora players and I always wanted to play it. I played with [Babatunde] Olatunji and then I learned to play Highlife music and all the African stuff.

Cadence: *Your performing status changed during 2023. The grueling international touring schedule you'd done for so many years was halted due*

Interview: Marshall Allen



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to age considerations. How challenging had those extensive European tours become for you?

Allen: The thing about world tours, they're wonderful but if you do 25 or 30 performances in a row, hey man, it takes you out. In 2019, we played 30-some-odd days of one-nighters. [Laughs] You see? And, man, you're traveling from one end of the country to another and back and forth and back and forth.

[Whew] When I got back here in 2019, I was wiped out. I was so tired, getting no sleep, sleeping on the train, sleeping anywhere I could sleep because it was always traveling from one city to another. So that wore me down and then I slowed down a little bit since then.

Cadence: When did you cut down your touring?

Ronnie Boyd: It was in the fall of 2022 that we started slowing it down. We started realizing the fact that someone getting older like Marshall Allen can't be flying overseas and having a grueling schedule. So what I did was to put together an agenda explaining why it's not good for someone Marshall's age to be flying like that.

Allen: There you go again. If you feel like this, I don't care how old you are, you still do your work. If you feel good, there's no pressure, and that's the way it is. If I'm a 100, so? I feel just as good as I did when I was in my 70s and 80s. I get more energy and enthusiasm as I go along and the only thing now is I'm not slowing down, it's the people around me that think that when you get to 90 or 100, that you're out of it. That it's the end of the line but it's not really because you learn how to do work without giving out a lot of energy. When you're younger, you just throw energy in and go, but now I place my energy towards the right things and I don't wear myself out. I don't get bored either.

Cadence: How difficult has it been emotionally to have the Arkestra go off to perform without you?

Allen: It did bother me but I thought I better listen to my doctor. He said slow down, which is alright. I have to slow down because I get tired. I've been doing this since I was 18 and never stopped. So now I stopped and I can do something else. I'll write some music. I've got ideas and I put them down. I'm here by myself and I've got all these instruments that I can play and write for. You know, you feel good when you accomplish something, when you write a composition.

Cadence: You remain the musical director of the Arkestra but longtime Arkestra member Knoel Scott is now conducting the band.

Allen: Yeah, I passed it to the next person. Like Sun Ra passed and John [Gilmore] took over, and then after John, there was nobody left that wanted to take over. All they wanted to do was take the stuff [some of the ephemera and collected items are missing], take all the stuff we done and distribute it and make money and do their thing. I said, 'No, I'll save everything,' that's why it looks so junky in here. I saved everything. No, I'm gonna carry on the music that Sun Ra spent a lifetime writing and dreaming and talking about. I'm gonna

Interview: Marshall Allen



Marshall Allen and Sun Ra Arkestra - Photo credit © Ken Weiss

Interview: Marshall Allen

try that and see if it helps me, and it did. It kept me out of trouble, it kept me from doing wrong things, from wearing myself out. It made me sincere about whatever I'm doing, do it, and then what I don't know, good. Then I get on the bandstand and follow the director. [Hums a tune] You see? All the vibrations of the day, to where I feel today because tomorrow, the music will be changed. The same song will be there but the parts will change because that's the way I feel today. Now, when the musicians change, that's when the work comes because they're in the square, because they 'know.' I don't want to hear what you know, I want to hear what you don't know. That's the feeling. Now, how you gonna tell a musician that? They're in the square playing good, it's not that they ain't playing, but it ain't creative. The creator gives you some music to create but use it properly by knowing how. So, I get on the bandstand but Knoel takes over. He's going along with the song but then I want to get along on it so I say, 'Listen, this is where I feel today,' which nobody knows if they don't watch the conductor. I'm going to create, it's the same song but different inside and different parts. It's about creating what you feel today. The only way to get a band to do that is to do what Sun Ra did with us with the old band. Every day, seven days a week, for years, in and out. And then all the things I want to do is in between that. So that's what I'm doing now, I don't mind stopping because when I come, I come with me and the spirit of today. It's not what you got in the square. So, you know this, good, play a little what you know and then do the spirit of the day. And then by me being here every day training them about the way I'm thinking, I give them expanded minds instead of being correct. Life ain't correct, not every day it's not. It's there, you adjust yourself and move on. So that's the way with the music. I play the music and I don't have to be nowhere. That's the way it is, that's the vibrations of the day.

Cadence: How was it decided that Knoel Scott would be the one to step up and take over?

Allen: He's next in line so he takes over and he goes the way he thinks but I can still come in and go the way I think, too. And then it's not all in the square, it's done with what I know. Some of us don't know nothing – listen, be a part, and put your part in so I don't need to tell you what your part is. I don't need to write it down or nothing. You put your part in because that's the way you feel today. See, that's how you get something that's always a little different on the same song. Sun Ra would write you a part – you got your part, you come back tomorrow, you don't have no part. So you do all that studying, hoping you get your part and then he'd give your part to somebody else and give you another part. It was kind of mind-boggling. I'd say, 'I've been in all week, practicing since the last gig,' and then he gives it away to somebody else. [Laughs] You come today and play the arrangement, come tomorrow, the arrangement changed. You think you've got your part – uh-uh – that part is out, you've got another part. Or it could happen five minutes before you go on the show. He had a thing, five minutes before the show, he'd say, "Play this,

Interview: Marshall Allen

don't play that, which you know, I'm gonna play this new stuff." And then when it was time to hit, he'd say, "Go out there and play, open the show." He'd send one man out to blow his horn and open the show while we're back there getting a new part on the song. You'd be thinking, 'Goddam, I had my part down good but he don't want me to play it,' and then he changes it." When he did that, you could get a little frustrated so I had to change my thinking to I don't know nothing and that's good, I'll learn. It's easy to say that but when you have a whole bunch of people, they've got to be on the same page.

Cadence: You've been playing music for over 80 years, is there a lot that you don't know about music at this point?

Allen: Yeah, everything, I don't know nothing. That's what Sun Ra said – "You've got a nice sound and all that but you're not phrasing like I want you to. You can make the music come alive with the right diction and the right punctuations – ups, downs – all of that." He said, "You know this, I don't want to hear that." That means that you're really listening from your heart. He was trying to get you to do that because otherwise it didn't fit into his music. That was a real blow to your ego and everything else. [Laughs] One day I got so mad and so sad, I just played anything and he said, "Oh, that's good." I said, 'I'm gonna do everything wrong.' It wasn't wrong, it was what I felt and it fit. When playing something you know, you're gonna do it by the rules, so it's a square. So that's the way I've been built to dance after Sun Ra's gone. I couldn't do all the things he did but I want to keep his music alive and put some of me in it at the same time because he left room for something else. He played melodies and background and then there's room for creativity in his music. That's what I had to find out – the creativity part in his music

Cadence: Knoel Scott is not only brilliant on saxophone, flute and vocals, he's added an additional mesmerizing aspect to the Arkestra's performances throughout the years with his freakish athletic displays and leaps from hands to feet.

Allen: He's a good player but like I said, I had to bring him in here and change his thing to help me. Now it's his time, okay, I slowed down, now you take it. So he's doing his thing the way he thinks. When you take over this band, you've got to be creative.

Cadence: I've observed over the years how much music fills your existence. During quiet gaps of time off stage, you're always humming music and tapping your fingers to a beat. How have you balanced your music and your life?

Allen: I'm humming different parts and you put them together like a jigsaw puzzle. Music is my life, that's all I do. I don't know nothing so I got the whole world to bring in. I don't know nothing. See, once I knew something, I was in the square, I couldn't get out of the square. It was just a spiral moving on down. I came out of the conservatory, I thought I knew everything and then I came to Sun Ra and he said, "No, that's not what I want. It's good, it's alright, but that's in the square. That's not what I want." You're gonna insult me?

Interview: Marshall Allen

[Laughs] How hard did I study to get that stuff right? And then he said, “No, that’s alright but you’ve got to play from here.” [Taps chest] “You’ve got to play what you don’t know. The spirit of the day. You don’t know when you walk out that door, but the spirit guides you.” [One day] I was walking down the street, a plant fell off a house. I usually walk on the sidewalk everyday but that day I thought to walk in the street. There were no cars coming so I walked in the street and the plant fell on the sidewalk. That was something I didn’t know but the spirit guided me. See? Little things like that and you can see what I’m talking about. So you play music like that too but you have to be listening. You can’t be looking at some nice-looking woman. Keep your attention, you’ve got to be in it.

Cadence: *You said there was a plant that fell on the sidewalk?*

Allen: Yeah, something just told me to walk in the street. I said, ‘Oh, that’s something I didn’t see.’ And then I understood what Sun Ra was talking about – you do the right thing without thinking about doing it, you just do it. The spirit guided me off the sidewalk so I said, ‘It does work!’ You don’t think about what you’re doing, you just do what you do and you need to get the whole band thinking that way. When I walk out that door, I don’t know nothing, but if you’re open, the spirit will guide you. I can go out on the street, turn around, and go the other way and then all hell breaks loose where you were supposed to be going. [Laughs] And you say, ‘Damn, I’m glad I came this way!’ Those kinds of things you can’t plan, you just do them when it comes.

Cadence: *Anyone who’s seen you play knows that you don’t like performances to end. When it seems like the band is done playing you’ll often start playing something on your own to keep the music going.*

Allen: Yeah, boil and boil and boil!

Ronnie Boyd: Dad was performing with Kash Killion here in Philadelphia recently and Kash had stopped playing and it was pretty much over, but dad kept playing. He had the energy to keep going and the people were loving it. The audience wanted more and he kept playing his saxophone and his Casio. He kept playing because he’s in that energy space to give to the people what’s been given to him.

Allen: It’s hard to find out but you find out and you just do it and you say, ‘Oh, I did the right thing.’

Cadence: *You end your performances by reciting “Hit That Jive, Jack!”*

Allen: Yeah, I say ‘Hit that jive, Jack, put it in your pocket till I get back.’ So it’s ‘Hit that jive, Jack.’ Bam! ‘Put it in your pocket till I get back. Now I’m going outer space as fast as I can. Ain’t got time to shake your hand.’ [Claps his hands] Gone! That’s all. [Laughs]

Cadence: *Why do you do that?*

Allen: It’s a little thing. ‘Hit that jive, Jack!’ [Laughs] Sun Ra put that in there, he put all that stuff in there. It was like show band. You dance - you don’t sit up there like symphony folks and just play your horn and just sit there. No, you

Interview: Marshall Allen

have to be a showman. You have to dance, you have to sing, you gotta move, and all of that. He had a band like that. Somebody would get up and dance and if they weren't a dancer, they'd do a dance that they knew or a dance they felt, and the whole band is moving. So it's a show and we have costumes.

Cadence: *What's the history behind the colorful costumes the band always wears?*

Allen: The first costumes we got were from the opera house. Eventually, Sun Ra began to make his own and we had dancers in the band that sewed and made costumes and came up with ideas. So, when you're watching, you've got something to look at. You've got people with different costumes and it's a show. We get up, we ain't just sitting there. You're moving constantly, it's a show band. He put all that stuff in there to play the music and it's quite a show. You look around and everybody's playing something different and dancing!

[Laughs]

Cadence: *I've noticed even at your performances outside of the Arkestra that you always perform in glittery outfits.*

Allen: It's always a show.

Cadence: *You're very open to playing in all different types of settings and with all different types of musicians.*

Allen: Yea, I'll play with the amateurs and the professionals, whatever. I was in Scotland playing with kids and they were playing those horns good. I had to take them, make a band, and give a show. I used to do all of that kind of stuff. I tell people to focus and listen to what everybody is doing and put your part in there

Cadence: *In your later years, you've turned to playing the Steiner EVI (electronic valve instrument) more often. What's the history behind your playing that instrument? How did you come to start playing it? Were you one of the first to use it?*

Allen: When Steiner first came up with the instrument, they sent it to Italy to the Crumar company, an organ and keyboard company, to produce it. We were in Italy and Sun Ra saw we were gonna pass right by the Crumar company so Sun Ra went into the factory. They had these EVIs and they gave us seven of them. They had just come out. Everybody was enthused for a while and we were all playing them but as time went by, they got cast away except by me. I kept five of them. I liked them and kept on playing but everybody else didn't want to play them. They played their flutes and other stuff. [Laughs] I like it.

Cadence: *How do you see the EVI fitting into your music?*

Allen: I don't know anything like that. When the spirit gets you, nobody can ask you how do you know this? You don't. The spirit tells you to do certain things and it comes out. It tells me to keep playing and I like it. I like it because it has seven octaves, like a piano, and I use it like that.

Cadence: *For years you kept a red string around the bell of your alto saxophone to represent fire.*

Interview: Marshall Allen

Allen: Yea to keep the fire burning. I put my banner on, I wrap it around the bell of my horn.

Cadence: Yes, in the past you told me the red string represented fire. Recently, you've been sporting a blue string on your horn. Why the change and what does the blue string represent?

Allen: Well, I've got different colors - I've got gold, red and blue.

Cadence: But it was always red that I saw around your horn for many years and now I see it's blue. Why the change and what does it represent?

Allen: Well, that was that horn. The red is my better horn. Each horn I give a ribbon around it of different colors. One's red, one's gold and one's blue. The blue doesn't represent something else, it's a different horn, and each one's got a different sound. I've got two altos left. One is a heavier sound and one has a light sound. I don't like the light sound for a band.

Cadence: You play with a very distinctive style on saxophone that is often explosive. It's been described by some as a "pyrotechnic" playing style. At times, you strum the saxophone keys like a guitar with a clawed hand which releases an explosion of sound. How did you develop that?

Allen: All these saxophone players I was around (when I was young) were professional. (Zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom) They'd be gone, boy. I mean, there was Don Byas and Coleman Hawkins, all them kind of people. They were SAXOPHONE players and they just scripted through that stuff and I said, 'Dag! How could they do that?' Charlie Parker and all them. I decided I'd play so fast till I could raise myself up like a whirlwind. So, I play until I get that feeling and then I go - [shouts wooooo] - raise up. [Laughs] It's just like putting a whirlwind thing on you and going up - like having air push under an umbrella and you go up with it.

Cadence: I've never seen anybody else play like you play, How did you come to play like you do?

Allen: That's what's in my head. It's just a way that you think and then you find a way of doing it. I used to cut up my fingers because they would get in the springs and the springs would cut my fingers. I was always having bleeding fingers. My hand was bloody until I got a better horn where the springs didn't stick up there, and then instead of pulling in, I pulled out, so that my fingers don't hit those springs anymore. Those springs were like needles, so now I pull back and then go across the keys. It's a style like going up in a balloon. I had that kind of thinking.

Cadence: That's what it feels like to you?

Allen: Yea, I feel like I'm gonna ease up out of the chair. I thought that if I played fast enough, I'd probably raise up out of my seat. [Laughs] I don't know if I do or not but I feel light.

Cadence: Have you had out-of-body experiences while playing?

Allen: Yeah, I float through walls, that kind of stuff. Weird things happen. Once I was in the room in the back of the house and [other band members] were in the front room. They were in there talking and I went through the wall and

Interview: Marshall Allen

went into the front room and listened to the conversation. But I got scared and I came back out of that and I told them everything they were talking about and they looked at me. And then one time in New York, it went the same way. I went out through the wall and I got scared and I came back. I've had two or three of those experiences and they make you think differently. I was in control but I got scared that I'd get locked in. I got all the way through with my head (through the wall) that first time but I got scared and came back. But the next time, I went through the wall completely and listened to everything they were talking about and they said, "How'd you do that when you were in the back room?" I don't really know what that was.

Cadence: *You served in the United States Army's 92nd Infantry Division (also known as the "Buffalo Soldiers") during WWII.*

Allen: Yes, in 1942 they were looking for musicians for their 28-piece band and I could already play the clarinet a little bit so I joined the band as a way to get away from shooting somebody. That was down in Brownsville, Texas, just off the border. And then I had two weeks' trial to learn to play some of the marches. There happened to be a very good clarinet player in the band and he tutored me. I was playing fourth parts and fifth parts and I got into the band. We also formed a dance band and we played at officer clubs. The ("Buffalo Soldier") infantry went to Italy and they transferred the band to Fort Sam Houston headquarters, and from headquarters they sent us to 2nd Cavalry Division for a while, and then they changed us again to the infantry and we went to Mississippi and Kentucky and then from there we finally went overseas with 13 large ships full with troops. It was black at night out there in the sea and you'd see a big, bright light go "boom!" out in the dark and you'd know the submarines got another destroyer or troop ship. They didn't get us though. I was on the back with my life jacket on most of the time, just in case. [Laughs] We went into Le Havre (France) and that was all banged up too. I was in the service for seven years and finished in Germany. When I came out, I was in Austria drinking vodka with the Russian soldiers and acting crazy.

Cadence: *How scary was that going over to war on the ship?*

Allen: I tell you; I didn't go down in the hull. I didn't go down there, I wouldn't sleep. I stayed up on deck with my life jacket on most of the time. Yea, I wouldn't go down there and then have a torpedo hit that ship. Shoot, because I'd seen big blazes out there on the ocean when the submarines hit ships.

Cadence: *Were you involved in any actual fighting?*

Allen: No, we were a band. We were back with the prisoners of war and with the guys behind the lines, keeping the morale behind the line of fighting. I was over there when Patton got killed. We took care of prisoners of war and other stuff.

Cadence: *You played in the 101st Infantry Division's band during the 1945 V-E Day [Victory in Europe Day] parade for President Eisenhower in Reims, France.*

What do you recall from that day? Did you see Eisenhower?

Allen: Yes, we were the only band in the parade. I've got a newspaper clipping

Interview: Marshall Allen

in an album upstairs which shows the band and the generals. It felt good to do that on V-E Day. The war was over, we were in the parade, the only band in it, in front of the generals – yeah, that felt good. [Laughs]

Cadence: *After the war, you stayed in Europe for Classical clarinet study on the GI Bill at Paris' National Conservatory. While there, you had exposure to artists such as Don Byas, James Moody and Annie Ross who lived in the same hotel as you. Would you talk about your time spent with them?*

Allen: I was playing in the officer's club and one of the lieutenant generals said, "I like the way you play. When are you getting out of the army?" I said, "I got another year," and he said, "Well, you come to Heidelberg next year and I'll see that you have all your papers straight for the GI Bill." When I got to my last week or two, I went to Heidelberg to the general and he said, "Sit down, have a drink." He got on the phone and said, "I want this man's papers processed before twelve o'clock," because twelve o'clock was lunch. I went through the process (swiftly), it usually took days to do. I had a three-day pass so I traveled around to where other musicians were and I had a go time. After that, I got my papers and I was [gone]. I trained in Paris and all the musicians and bands would come to Paris and play so I was right in the heart of where they all were – Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Eartha Kitt was there, she was running around with us for a while and then the next thing you know – she was over at the Lido with the big folks. [Laughs] I lived around the corner from the Lido where all the dancing girls were. I hung out with all the musicians that lived in the area because they had a hotel on the same street. James Moody was there. Don Byas was there and he was always inviting me to come over. He was going down to the South of France to play and I'd go down there and play too. We'd be there with Sidney Bechet We'd all be on the beach down there and they'd be showing off – "Who's the greatest? Who's in better shape?" I'd listen to Byas and Bechet, two old men, talking about who's the greatest and who's the strongest and all that. [Laughs] We were all laughing. They kind of took me under their wing and they would tell me all of their stories and I would listen. [Laughs]

Cadence: *What do you recall of your interaction with Charlie Parker at a jam session in Paris?*

Allen: He came in late with somebody carrying his horn. They didn't have the drummer there so I got on the drums and tried to do my Denzil Best at the jam session. Do you know Denzil Best? I did the brushes, you know, like "Big Sid" Catlett. I was no drummer but I could keep a beat. Charlie Parker came in there late. That place was almost ready to close and here he comes, but he still did hit the jam session.

Cadence: *You played drums for Charlie Parker?*

Allen: No, I wasn't no drummer, I was just filling in because the drummer wasn't there. That was just at the jam session. Another jam session was with Don Byas and Coleman Hawkins and a bunch of cats. There I had my horn sitting on my lap listening to them and they said, "Come on Red, play your

Interview: Marshall Allen

horn!" I couldn't play like they played but I tried. [Laughs]

Cadence: *Is it true you played drums for Sidney Bechet one night in Paris?*

Allen: Sidney's drummer didn't show up so I had to do the rehearsal. I played the drums a little bit, doing the Denzil Best brush sweeps. [Laughs] The drummer finally came and then the concert was on. And then Sidney gave me his ring and his girlfriend and told me to watch them. He said, "Take my ring, take my girlfriend and watch her. Take care of her while I'm on stage." [Laughs] I was his bodyguard for his girlfriend.

Cadence: *You returned to the States on a boat to New York with refugees with whom you got grouped in with. What's the story behind that?*

Allen: It was the SS Nassau that made its maiden voyage out of Italy and it had 7,000 people on it. There were refugees on there with me because I came back after the war was over. I came back in the '50s. Yeah, they thought I was one of the refugees because I was playing with an Italian band on the ship after one of the musicians got seasick and I got the gig. They wanted me to go from New York to Nassau and I said, "No, I'm going from New York to Chicago. I'm going home." I turned that gig down and went on home but then they got me mixed up with the refugees and they sent me along with a ticket. And then, the next thing you know, the government said I owed them five hundred dollars. [Laughs] I paid them back but at the time they called me a refugee and they sent me home quick. I said, 'Oh, boy, I don't have to spend no money,' and then the next thing you know, I got a bill. [Laughs]

Cadence: *You headed to Chicago where your mother lived and got a job.*

Allen: I was working in a camera company polishing camera lenses. First, they gave me the dirty job of cleaning the pit – the trough that runs around the area where they polished the glass with that old stinky stuff. Yeah, I did that, nobody wanted that job but I took it and I did a good job. I'd put my fingers over my nose, and then they put me over to polishing lenses. That was a good job for a while. I'd come to work with my horn, all dressed up with all the workers looking at me, after being up all night with Sun Ra. [Laughs] I'd be coming in late after I got through with Sun Ra - he'd keep you up all night long. I lost my job fooling around with Sun Ra after coming in late every day. I was out every night with Sun Ra and when the time came to fire someone, they fired me. I had my horn at work and instead of eating lunch, I'd go in the bathroom and practice my flute. At that time, I'd also be going around, buying all the records. That's when I bought Sun Ra's demos, and I heard that and I said, 'Oh!' Around that time, I had been promoted at work to diamond grinding but I wasn't in there long enough to learn anything but that was a good job and my pay went up. I did that a little bit and then I was fired because of coming in late all the time.

Cadence: *When did you sleep?*

Allen: When I went home after work and then we had rehearsal in the evening. And then I had to take flute lessons, which I took with the flute player out of

Interview: Marshall Allen

the Chicago Symphony. He had a shop where he taught kids and he told me if I taught them saxophone, he'd give me flute lessons afterwards. So, I got free flute lessons but no pay for working with the kids.

Cadence: *Was your plan to be a professional musician at the time you came back to Chicago after the service?*

Allen: No, I had to get a job and then I also didn't know anybody. I did jam sessions all over the place in different little clubs. Then I got me a little band with vibes and a bass and drums and we played dances and little clubs. I wasn't making no money but I had a band. And then I met Sun Ra and that was it – got hooked with that.

Cadence: *Marshall, do you want to take a break?*

Allen: No, are you tired? [Everyone laughs]

Cadence: *It's well documented that you heard a Sun Ra recording in Joe Segel's record store in Chicago and met up with Sun Ra at his nearby home shortly afterwards.*

Allen: I heard the record with "Super Blonde" (released 1956) on it. Man, I heard that, boy, and I thought, 'Dag!' I asked Joe Segel about the band and he said they rehearsed in a ballroom during the day right up on the South Side where I lived – about 6 blocks from me. So, I went and found them. I went into the building and Sun Ra was in the ballroom, sitting down, writing stuff, and the band was rehearsing. I came in there with my little saxophone and he looked at me [Laughs] like, "Oh, here comes a rookie." And then he made me late for work the next day. The next thing you know, I got my notice and then I had to go and get another job. I started doing portraits. My sister worked for artists and she offered me to come to work with her because they wanted somebody to (sit for portrait modeling). I made a little money that way and then my mother put me out. [Laughs] "You've got to leave and get a job!" She put my stuff out through the door and I took my stuff and went over to my girlfriend's house but I couldn't stay there long so I was floating for a minute. I went back home eventually when she wasn't mad no more. [Laughs]

Cadence: *What was that first meeting with Sun Ra like?*

Allen: He was sitting there writing and then I had to follow him around. He said, "I'm going next door to eat," and then after he ate, he went over to where Jug (Gene Ammons) was playing. By then it was 4 AM and I had to go home and be at work by 8, so I didn't get much sleep.

Cadence: *When you met Sun Ra for that first time did you feel anything special about his presence? Did you feel a spiritual connection or anything out of the ordinary?*

Allen: No, I heard the record, that's all I needed to do. I said, 'That band, I want to be in it!' Sun Ra was a master of his trade. There are people that seem to know things, that know about everything, and you listen to them. You wonder if you believe it, and then it comes true. He was telling us about the future and you wonder, 'How he know all about that?' You have your doubts,

Interview: Marshall Allen

and yet, things happened just like he said. He said, “Now, we’ll make this band for the 21st century,” and it was 29 years that we had to wait for the 21st century! [Laughs] I was in the band 29 years before the 21st century. [Laughs] He was right, and we had to learn, we had to rehearse and rehearse, that’s the way it was. He was accurate. I didn’t believe half of it. I didn’t believe everything but everything came true. Yeah, it’s all good stuff. It took discipline, I had to learn about that. It wasn’t so easy to learn that unless you really wanted it but I had to learn that if I wanted to survive and if I wanted to carry on his work. I had to remember things, remember the combinations and stuff. I had to remember that stuff. I was always around (him) so I remembered enough to carry on and add little things to it.

Cadence: *What do you think is most misunderstood about Sun Ra today?*

Allen: I don’t know. He was a person that knew how to deal with people. And you couldn’t fool him about nothing, and yet he wasn’t an angel, but he was. He’d have some Grand-Dad [Old Grand-Dad bourbon whiskey] that he’d have in his room and we used to go up there and [makes a drinking motion and gulps!] take a sip. [Laughs] Then we’d hear – “Somebody’s been in my bottle!” [Laughs] He knew and we’d go, Ugh oh.’ But he just had a knack for people. I never met nobody like him. He was always talking about discipline and this and that, and quit wasting your time, and all that stuff. I didn’t like it but I had to do it. I didn’t like being restricted all the time. I’d try to sneak out and I’d hear, “Wait, come here a minute.” I’d think, ‘Oh, God,’ and he’d say, “I’ll play this and you can go on about your business,” and then I’d be there all night playing that stuff. I’d be mad – ‘There goes my night!’ [Laughs] Oh, forget it! But he knew what I needed and I got it. I needed some control and discipline to do my work. I was lacking in that because I had been free all my life, free to go which way I wanted. Yea, he did me some good - I stopped making all that crazy stuff.

Cadence: *How do you share that discipline with the current members of the Arkestra?*

Allen: Oh, it’s like anything else. You’ve got to have discipline as a doctor. You live with it and address yourself and keep steppin’. Sometimes you don’t want to go to the office, and go through all that stuff, but you do it. It’s no different from professional jobs. Whatever you do, you do it, but sometimes you’d like to be doing something else, but you have to stand your ground unless you can’t. Like now, this house is all messed up and I am in no physical shape to fix it like before when I’d be up there painting everything. It wouldn’t be dirty like this.

Cadence: *So who was going into Sun Ra’s bottle?*

Allen: Everybody was sneaking to get a drink, who knows? [Laughs] I’d say, ‘I didn’t bother it, not me.’

Cadence: *I’ve never told you the Sun Ra story I have. As you know, I was the primary care doctor for (Arkestra saxophonist) John Gilmore at the end of his life when he was too weak to leave this house. In order to get his medical*

Interview: Marshall Allen

background information, I spoke with his previous doctor who had also been Sun Ra's doctor. That doctor told me the first time he met Sun Ra was at the hospital's intensive care unit. Sun Ra didn't have a doctor there so he got assigned to this doctor who said, "I went to meet him and I saw his name posted as Sun Ra outside the room. I thought that was very odd. Then I met him and he had purple and red facial hair and claimed to be from Saturn. I went outside to order a psychiatric consult when another internist came up to me all excited and said, "Do you know who you are seeing? You have Sun Ra!" And he explained Sun Ra to me and I canceled the consultation." He thought Sun Ra was insane at first.

Allen: [Laughs] Oh, boy, you'd either believe it or not. You were always on the edge saying, 'What?' Yeah, but you couldn't fool him. Boy, he was sharp, that's just a gift some people have. That imagination, the magic carpet, and he'd be writing all those songs and poems and stuff.

Cadence: Magic carpet?

Allen: He'd put music to what he was talking about. All that stuff he'd be talking about is in the music. That was his idea of the world, not my idea of things as they are.

Cadence: A lot of what he was talking about was really his way of dealing with racism, right?

Allen: All of it.

Cadence: This wasn't a fair world so he put himself somewhere else. Was that something he spoke about?

Allen: He spoke about everything. There is nothing you can think of that he didn't hit. He was just a person that you might run into once in a lifetime. He was just a natural, it was natural for him. He'd read you like a book – know your weakness, know what to do, and know your potential. Because he wouldn't keep a lot of people around but he'd keep (some people around that you couldn't understand why). We'd ask, 'What do you got him here for?' But he had something that Sun Ra could use. Because he had some nutty people around, boy. Some crazy people and some bad people and he had them all under control. Even the bad guys were under control. That's another kind of person that can do that, you know? And he got the best out of everybody. I don't care who you were, he'd get the best out of you and he'd find something that he can use from you. That's why he was always talking about discipline. Nobody had discipline – which was right – everybody was free. [Laughs] At least they thought they were.

Cadence: Are there any Sun Ra teachings or compositional techniques that you are just starting to understand or those that took years for you to know what he was intending?

Allen: I've seen a lot of people with techniques of music and playing and you wonder how they do that. It just looks like everything flows right over whatever they do. Sun Ra was like that. He'd hit a chord; you don't know what it is. It's sound. He'd play some stuff and it was boggling. And he'd play a

Interview: Marshall Allen

rhythm against rhythm, 5 against 3, or against all odd numbers, and boom! – it would come out. I never met nobody like him – that’s why I stayed with him so long. There wasn’t nobody like him that I’ve met in my life.

Cadence: *What do you think Sun Ra would have had to say about the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Allen: We already knew something was coming because he said so, like the plagues and all that. We’d already been informed. His thing was informing us of the future – the things that would happen – something would come along and wipe folks out. It was hard to believe until you see it with your own eyes. He talked about things coming along to punish folks and you either believed him or you didn’t.

Cadence: *Charles Mingus told his musicians he was looking to create a kind of “organized chaos” on the bandstand when they played his compositions. Is that a similar goal for the Arkestra?*

Allen: Chaos, yeah, because in the future you’re gonna have chaos. Now, you’ll be prepared if you already experienced chaos and move out of it. He didn’t call it that but there’s plenty of chaos now and as you go. He already told us about that, whether you believe it or not. Like I said, you believe some things and then some things come true and some things you wait on and it comes later. See? But he wasn’t crazy but damn, what kind of man is this? He was a teacher if you listened. You’d be better off for knowing what’s happening. You take some of his stuff and you wonder about it and then turn around and it happens. Sun Ra was talking about transmolecularing himself to another planet and then I’m thinking about me going through the walls. Now, who gonna believe me and who gonna believe him? So I accept that he went to all the planets, maybe he did. I went through the wall and everybody’s looking at me like I’m crazy. There’s some things that I don’t know that happened to people so I wouldn’t say, ‘No, you didn’t go nowhere’ because I don’t know. They don’t believe me when I say I went through the walls but when I went and told them everything they were talking about, then they wondered, “How do you know that?” I said, ‘I was right there looking at it.’ I just quit talking about it because they didn’t believe me but still, they wondered how I knew what happened. I got scared twice when I went through them walls. I was scared, boy – ‘Oh, Lord, I’m gonna be locked out before the hole closed.’

Cadence: *The Arkestra is still playing Sun Ra’s compositions. He left a massive amount of work behind. How many of his compositions have yet to be performed?*

Allen: I have never in my life seen one person have so much music that he wrote. Stacks! They haven’t played all them tunes. I’ve got so many tunes up there, you’d be surprised. There may be 500 to a thousand yet to be performed. I’m telling you, man, he’s someone that affected my whole life. That man and the way he thought. He’d tell me to sit down and play something he just wrote and I’d look at it and say, ‘What is that?’

Interview: Marshall Allen

Cadence: *What's going to become with the music that's not been used yet?*

Allen: It's upstairs. The band's never gonna play all his music. He's got some finger-busters up there and mind-wailers. They're something else. And then I forget, as the years go by, the combinations he used. You'd get one song here and he'd put another song in there and it would work.

Cadence: *Any idea how many pieces he wrote?*

Allen: He'd write them like he'd write a letter. I'd say, Damn! I had my little 10, 15, 20 tunes, I thought I was doing something until I looked at him and he had a stack like that.

Cadence: *What do his original compositions look like? Are they fully notated?*

Allen: They're notated. When people write, they write differently. He liked me because I used to do copy work. If somebody brought me the score, I'd print it up because I had a good hand for note writing. My notes would be nice and clean. I used to do that, I'm a copyist. I copied different scores for different people to make a few dollars. I did that for Count Basie once after Sun Ra wrote music for him. Count Basie had a 15-20-piece band and I had to copy all that stuff for his band. And then his band went out there and Count Basie took the music and didn't even play it after I had worked day and night, handwriting all the parts for his band. That sucker got up there and didn't play it [Laughs] so we took it and played it ourselves.

Cadence: *Count Basie paid you to do that?*

Allen: No, I was doing that for Sun Ra.

Cadence: *Oh, Sun Ra would pay you for that?*

Allen: No, he wasn't gonna pay you! [Laughs]

Cadence: *You've been actively working on Sun Ra's music.*

Allen: I work on his music, there's always spots in his music to create something. He left space in his music.

Cadence: *What exactly have you been doing with his pieces?*

Allen: I'm writing out 16 parts for his music. I'll sit up there and do that. I've got Noel trying to do that. I ain't doing nothing right now.

Cadence: *How meaningful is it to you that Sun Ra's music continues to live on to the next century?*

Allen: That's right, like I said, in my life I've never met nobody like that, that had so much music and so many ideas. That's why I stayed all this time – without money or nothing.

Cadence: *How meaningful is it to you that Marshall Allen's music continues to live on?*

Allen: I've been writing my melodies and ideas for years. [Allen could not be pinned down for an answer]

Cadence: *The Jazz Detective label just released previously unreleased Sun Ra music – Sun Ra at the Showcase: Live in Chicago (1976-1977). It's two live sets that include you. What strikes you about that recording when you listen to it today?*

Interview: Marshall Allen

Allen: I made so many recordings; I don't remember all this stuff. Sunny did this 7 days a week, now how you gonna remember all of that? Seven days a week he had you rehearsing, and had you playing your parts, playing somebody else's because they're not here, and then he'd change it. So he got you working and all that's up in your head, you can't keep up with him. 1976? I don't remember back then. [Laughs] I remember the day we had this big band. He had to start from 4 people and make 25 to 100-piece band and then had to train them, so we were busy all the time.

Cadence: *The Arkestra under your leadership has started releasing new recordings. Swirling came out in 2020 as the first new Sun Ra Arkestra album in over 20 years. Why did it take so long to put out new music?*

Allen: "Swirling" is mine, that's from my book. Sun Ra has so much music, why am I gonna put mine out there? He had so much music that needed to be played, I don't need to write nothing. If I do, I just put it in my book. I've got my own book for when I think of melodies, I put them in my book. Sun Ra's got so much music and some of it's never been played. And then the combinations he'd fit with it – it's mind-boggling.

Cadence: *How did it feel to have the Arkestra receive its first-ever Grammy nomination with Swirling?*

Allen: That's nice, I'm glad to get some kind of recognition for the recording. The flattery was alright, I'm cool with somebody liking it but, you know, I'm not overboard, I've gotten out of that stuff.

Cadence: *Living Sky came out in 2022 and includes a number of your own compositions.*

Allen: I've got two on there. I've got 50-60-70-80 tunes and every now and then I'll put one or two on a record.

Cadence: *The Arkestra has lost a number of members over the last few years including Danny Ray Thompson, Charles Davis and Juini Booth. How are new members located?*

Allen: Well, we've got some new people, you've heard 'em. They're good musicians and they want to (be here). I never go out recruiting nobody much, if the creator sends somebody by here that wants to do this. I never go hunting folks, sometimes somebody shows up and they want to be in the band.

Cadence: *Are new members given any kind of indoctrination as far as the teachings of Sun Ra?*

Allen: You come in here and the music tells the story – can you play it? If you do – wonderful. And do you want to do this kind of discipline? We rehearse all the time. So that's it, if you want to rehearse, then you'll learn it.

Cadence: *The Arkestra's practice schedule was intense back in Sun Ra's day. What is the band's current practice status?*

Allen: Since Sun Ra's been gone, that's all I've been doing. You wear down, you've gotta take a break. The house is so bad, nobody wants to come so we've got another way of doing it – sending the music to each individual and they

Interview: Marshall Allen

practice it. You have to keep steppin. They don't come here now, that's why all this stuff is dirty, because nobody uses it until I clean it up more.

Cadence: *There's a lot of stuff in the house.*

Allen: Everybody who comes, brings something and leaves it. Now what you gonna do? People leave stuff here and then you go year in and year out and the next thing you know, you've got a pile of stuff that people have left. But it ought to be about the music – a place where you can rehearse and play it, and a place where you can study it and nobody's gonna bother you.

Cadence: *The good news is that the house got listed as a historical landmark in 2022 so it now has protected status.*

Allen: Yeah, but they take their time. They said they were gonna put out the plaque but we're still waiting. It's a slow process. I know the story -they wait for you to leave the planet before they do something and then what good is it gonna do you? You've gone on to another world and then someone else will reap the harvest. I'll just pass away before they do something. I guess that's what they're waiting on, everybody else is like that. When [people are] gone then there's the great house of whoever died. I ain't worrying about that, I've got the music keeping me alive, and I'm just gonna keep steppin' as long as I've got the energy and the will, and while it's doing me some good, but in the meantime, you've got all these things just nappin at you – breaking you down. You've got all of that. I've got these little things just gnawing me. You think I'm gonna give [up]? No, right on steppin' as long as I can keep on steppin'.

Cadence: *This house was one of two that your father originally owned until he "sold" it to Sun Ra for one dollar.*

Allen: Well, of course, nobody else wanted the place and he didn't need it – he had 3 or 4 more houses. I said this is a good place for Sun Ra - he's the one doing all the work – all the writing. He needed to get out of New York and all that crazy life and come down here where you go to bed at night [Laughs] and you can sit up all night and write.

Cadence: *What's the legal status of the house today?*

Allen: [The Sun Ra estate] has the deed for the house but they don't want it and I've told them to give it back to me and they're slowing around with that. Ain't nothing to do but just give me the house back and then I'll carry on the work. I ain't worried about it though. They're still collecting the royalties; they get their share of money. I got out of money hungry. I ain't got no money – I'm poor. All the stuff I've done – I still ain't got no money. You see? So what can you do? I'm glad I got my music. I'm glad I stayed with the music, otherwise, forget it. What else is there? I don't have no money, and then if I had some, what am I gonna do with it?

Cadence: *When's the last time you took a vacation?*

Allen: Vacation? I haven't heard that in a long time. Vacation? I don't get no vacations. I go all over the world, I run all over all these places. What do I need with a vacation? I'm on vacation when I'm out working. I'm out in different

Interview: Marshall Allen

places, different languages, different people. A vacation don't mean nothin'. Where am I gonna vacation to?

Cadence: *What are your interests outside of music?*

Allen: I like to watch people build things. I used to do that in New York a lot. And then I like to do some of that too – build something, fix something. But now, I'm kind of out of it because I'm not doing nothin'. I watch TV. I've quit watching the movies. I just turn on CNN and leave it. I go to sleep with it on and wake up with it on.

Cadence: *You're a political person?*

Allen: No, I don't think about all that stuff. I know what they're doing. The same old thing – ain't nothin' changed – [it's] the same old people. I just have something on to keep my attention. And then I listen to my music. Sometimes I don't have the TV at all.

Cadence: *The final questions are from other artists:*

Miguel Zenon (saxophone) asked: *"Mr. Allen: How do you stay inspired and challenged after such a long and accomplished career?"*

Allen: I told you – if you have some discipline and use the music it keeps your wellbeing. I'm talking about that. It's not music for money or women or fame – it's music for my wellbeing – and I have to believe that. And then it has to show that the music is healing. It will heal you from many things. It's enlightening, I'm singing about enlightenment. I'm singing the same thing that I'm playing. The lyrics are in the song. I want to keep my wellbeing. I ain't thinking about my age. Do I feel good? Yes. Do I feel old? No. I feel tired, I do like any normal folk but I don't get depressed. Depressed for what? I ain't got nothin', never had nothin'. You live, you eat, you practice, you dream, all of that. No pressure. Pressure is when there's fussin' and hollerin' and shootin' and killing and all that nutty stuff. I don't get none of that. I don't want none of that in my music.

Odean Pope (saxophone) said: *"Marshall, you are one of the greatest minds this country has produced. Thank you so much for so many years of moving this incredible art form forward. Where does the inspiration come from to play chord structures like you do? Do you realize the impact that your music and spiritual concepts have on the world?. Grace and gratitude to you."*

Allen: I'm playing the music for my well-being, and when you're playing something for your well-being, you're going in it. You're not skipping around; you're not showing off. You don't care about all of that. You ain't trying to please nobody, you're trying to heal yourself. It's you first and then you can give somebody something. You see? I don't care about who can play better or what they doing. I don't care, I'm trying to play from my [slaps his heart area] and not this [points to his head] because that'll mess me up for years. I'm trying to find the spirit of things – it's simple.

Bobby Zankel (saxophone) said, *"I want to tell you how much I've loved your playing, your mastery of the saxophone and of the beautiful traditional language created by such elders as Johnny Hodges and Willie Smith, and the*

Interview: Marshall Allen

way you extended that tradition, particularly on your feature of "Prelude to a Kiss." "Around 2003 I had the great fortune of driving you up to New York to rehearse with Cecil Taylor's ensemble for a gig up in Boston. We had a wonderful rehearsal but the gig ended up being cancelled the day before. Unfortunately, it never happened again. I want to know if you enjoyed rehearsing with Cecil and what your impression of that was?"

Allen: Cecil Taylor, I gotta say, is the consummate, and he got his code. I had to have somebody else help me with the code.

Cadence: The code?

Allen: Yeah, if you don't know what his code is you need to get help to follow it so I had someone help to follow along with what he's doing because Cecil was so busy playing so much stuff. He's sitting down at the piano going [Makes sound of pounding keys] and then I'm supposed to come in and I said, 'Where am I supposed to come in?' [Laughs] And then what note? So, I needed the code to his music. Bobby Zankel had it down and he was sittin' by me so he helped me to go with the stuff. It's like when someone played with Sun Ra, they don't know how Sun Ra plays unless somebody is there to help them.

Cadence: Did you enjoy rehearsing with Cecil Taylor?

Allen: I enjoy rehearsing with anybody. I'm not no hard to please, if you're playing something and you want to play it - good. I don't mind.

Bobby Zankel also said, "What was the relationship that you had to Pharoah Sanders when Pharoah played with the Arkestra in the early '60s? Pharoah went into the band around the same time that he made his first recording which came out on ESP where he's playing very beautifully but playing stuff just on the horn. He's not playing what we call 'off the horn' or playing multiphonics or talking in tongues on the horn. I heard a recording that you did in '64 with Paul Bley [Barrage, ESP], especially on the alternate take, where you were playing some really remarkable, really advanced things that implied where you were going with the horn and also where Pharoah went with the horn and I'm wondering if you and Pharoah used to practice together or if you felt that Pharoah was listening to what you were doing. I know you are so unpretentious and such a beautiful person that you wouldn't make yourself bigger than you were but it's my long-distance guess that you really influenced Pharoah."

Allen: Pharoah had big ears and he practiced with the band. If you were practicing something, he'd get it.

Cadence: Zankel is implying that you influenced Sander's playing.

Allen: Maybe, if somebody is using some of your stuff, it's an influence. That's like if you hear some stuff and you want to play it, then you put it in your repertoire. John [Gilmore], me, and Pat [Patrick], and all the others used to play, and you could take even more out of that playing. Everybody does that. You can take something but pop it up in your way.

Craig Harris (trombone) asked: "The way you use your knuckles on the

Interview: Marshall Allen

saxophone, is it hard on the instrument or is your technique so smooth it rolls off the keys?"

Allen: That's what I was telling you before. I used to do it one way and I was hittin' them needles and I had to change. If I wanted to get the speed, I had to do it without pressure. So, I'd lighten up instead of putting pressure on 'em. I had been putting a lot of pressure on 'em. I was bending keys and wearing 'em out until I lightened up. And it's a multi-sound sound.

Cadence: How long did it take to get that technique down?

Allen: It comes naturally after you get through banging up your fingers the wrong way – you change. I was tired of tearing up my fingers, now I only tear up my fingernails.

Cadence: You still do?

Allen: Yeah, I'm always doing that to my fingernails so I'm always trying to get them down so I don't hit them. I lighten up the pressure so they don't break off like they used to.

Roscoe Mitchell (multi-instrument) asked: "How do you do what you do?"

Allen: That's the way I think – chaos.

Cadence: You said chaos?

Allen: Yeah, I use everything. I use this! I use that! You get a different sound from everything and you can use different angles.

Andrew Cyrille (drums) said: "Regards Marshall, I hear about you often and I hope we see each other sometime soon. I've played with the Arkestra a few times. Would you talk about the time you and I played together with some of the other horn and drummer Sun Ra musicians in Babatunde Olatunji's Drums of Passion band?"

Allen: Yeah, I remember Olatunji. I played the bell, my flute and the alto. We played Highlife music from Nigeria which is singing songs and dancing. I did a recording with him. Olatunji was a good cat, beautiful.

Andrew Cyrille also asked: "What do you recall from the time that the Sun Ra Arkestra played that bar mitzvah at Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate? I sat in and the whole band wore suits!"

Allen: Whatever, we got through it. [Laughs] He's remembering things that I didn't remember. I've done so many things I can't remember all of them.

Cadence: Any final words you want to give to the people?

Allen: Yeah, just keep on listening and you'll see what happens. Just get the spirit and it may do you some good. You live longer, you feel better longer and you go about your life better. Some music makes you feel different and I'm doing it for my well-being and I can give you some for yours.