

Mill Valley Oral History Program
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JIMMY DILLON

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2015**

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TITLE: Oral History of Jimmy Dillon
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz
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In this musically infused and engagingly narrated oral history, guitarist, songwriter, and musical educator Jimmy Dillon recounts his devotion to music since the age of 12 when he decided he wanted to be a guitarist. Born in 1951 in Los Angeles, “in the golden age of rock ‘n’ roll,” Jimmy moved to Michigan with his family as a teenager, where he started gigging with his first band, The Fugitives. In 1969, after finishing high school, he moved back to California with his sister Chloe, settling in Sausalito. Jimmy dates his “love affair with Marin County” back to this moment. He recalls the music scene of the early 1970s in San Francisco and Marin, as well as his own first bona fide Marin band, The Edge. Jimmy recounts his 20-year musical relationship with Clarence Clemons and his deep love of the blues, which prompted him to write a play (or “bluesical”) entitled *Ascension of the Blues*, documenting the West African origins of the blues, its maturation in the United States, and subsequent diffusion throughout the world. Throughout this oral history, Jimmy describes how his career in music has taken him around the world, how he moved back to Michigan and later to Maui, but how, through all these migrations and displacements, Mill Valley — and Mt. Tam — continue to pull him back and occupy a special place in his personal geography. This oral history concludes with a brief guitar lesson on how to play a turnaround in the blues and finally with a moving performance by Jimmy of his original song, “Hold on to Your Dreams.”

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Oral History of Jimmy Dillon
October 26th, 2015

Please note: This transcript has been reviewed by Jimmy Dillon, who made minor corrections and clarifications.

0:00:00 Debra Schwartz: Today is October 26th, 2015. My name is Debra Schwartz and I am talking today with Jimmy Dillon. Jimmy, thanks so much for participating in the Mill Valley Library and Historical Society Oral History Program. I'm looking at a long list of the things that you've done in your life. I see that you're a musician, a composer, a teacher, a playwright, and a recipient of the Milley Award here in Mill Valley, so you've been very productive over the years.

0:00:37 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's true. [chuckles]

0:00:41 Debra Schwartz: So, let's start [with] a little bit about your history of your family, let's get some context in, so we can better understand what forces forged you and brought you to Marin County and created you to be this creative force that you are. Let's start with a little bit about your family.

0:01:02 Jimmy Dillon: Well, I was born in 1951 in Los Angeles, California in the Good Samaritan Hospital. My mom and dad, James J. Dillon Sr., and my mom Mary Jane Hearn Dillon, got married in Los Angeles right after the war, and they had four kids: myself, my brother Bill, my sister Chloe, and my sister Johannah. So, two boys and two girls. And we grew up in the '50s, the golden age of rock 'n' roll, and the golden age of the silver screen to some degree. My dad worked in the movie business for Fox.

0:01:33: So, growing up, the reason I mention that, is growing up in Los Angeles at that time, there were still orange groves and it was a very great time to be growing up in Southern California. And so, I was exposed to a lot of the early rock 'n' roll stuff. I used to deliver papers to recording studios and see Fabian and Johnny Mathis, and people like that. So it was an interesting place to grow up because as kids in school with sort of celebrities' kids and all that, we sort of took that for granted, that was — we were in the biz, we were around the biz.

0:02:05 Debra Schwartz: What did your father do?

0:02:07 Jimmy Dillon: My dad was an executive for Fox West Coast, so he basically did — oversaw the theaters in Los Angeles, made sure they were running correctly and all that. He had done some editing back in New York in his early days — he grew up in Manhattan from 1915 till the war. So he had some experience; he used to write speeches for Gene Tunney, who was a politician, before that, champion of the world. So my dad had some experience in that realm, but he started working for Fox when he moved out west during the war and married my mom. So that's what we grew up with. William Powell was in his wedding; that was just sort of the times we were in. I mean, one interesting thing was at my sister's graduation we had Ricky Nelson, Troy Donahue, Kris

Harmon who married Ricky, they were all —

0:02:56 Debra Schwartz: Oh my God!

0:02:57 Jimmy Dillon: But again, that was *de rigueur* for us, 'cause that's what we grew up with, we didn't think much of it. So fast forward, we moved to New York, to Larchmont, New York for a year, which was a transitional — my dad got a job that moved to New York City. And then, my dad ended up getting a job in Chicago, and so we moved to Michigan and my dad commuted. So, we moved to Benton Harbor, Michigan when I was 12, which was quite an adjustment for a Beverly Hills kid — from Beverly Hills to Benton Harbor.

0:03:23 Debra Schwartz: So, you were living in Beverly Hills?

0:03:26 Jimmy Dillon: Oh yeah, we lived on 437 South Rexford Drive in Beverly Hills.

0:03:29 Debra Schwartz: South what?

0:03:30 Jimmy Dillon: South Rexford, yeah.

0:03:31 Debra Schwartz: Oh gosh, you remember the address.

0:03:32 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah. So, we all grew up as kind of beach — I was like a surfer kid, and then I moved to Michigan, which was like the dark ages, snow, and all that. But at age 12, I had done pretty well in school; I got good grades and everything. My parents had pretty high hopes for me. And so I made the announcement at age 12 that "I'm gonna be a guitar player." And I said, "That's it, that's what I wanna do." And she's like, "Guitar player, okay. So then, Harvard Law is out?" And I was like, "Yeah, that's all out, I wanna play guitar for my life."

0:04:04 Debra Schwartz: Had you been influenced by the, some of the people, like Ricky Nelson, that you'd met?

0:04:08 Jimmy Dillon: Well, yeah, I had. I grew up listening to Elvis and all that 'cause, again, I was born and raised in the golden age of rock 'n' roll. So yes, that all seeped in, as it does, through the radio; but actually concretizing that and actually saying "I'm gonna play," that was a different thing. What happened was, somebody came to my house and played a song called "El Paso" by Marty Robbins.

0:04:34 Debra Schwartz: How's that song go?

0:04:35 Jimmy Dillon: [sings] "Down in the West Texas town of El Paso — " You know that song? It's a story song.

0:04:39 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:04:40 Jimmy Dillon: And, you know, that might be an unlikely launch for a rock ‘n’ roller in some ways; you might say Beatles, Stones, Dylan. This was before that though; this was during the Folk Scare of the ‘60s, right?

0:04:49 Debra Schwartz: Uh-huh.

0:04:49 Jimmy Dillon: Quickly after that rock ‘n’ roll, the ‘60s rock ‘n’ roll thing happened, the Beatles and the Stones — so my mom said, to her credit really, she said, “Well, if you’re really serious — .” And this guy Jamie Gillis who was playing an acoustic guitar in my living room said, “Look, if you’re really serious, come to South Bend, Indiana.” My mom went to Saint Mary’s and my uncles went to Notre Dame, so we’re “Double Domers.” So he said, “If you’re really serious, let me know. Call me after the summer and we’ll see if we can hook you up with a guitar.” So, my mom said, “Here’s the deal, you gotta work for it.” And at that point I was a beach kid, but not a work-hard kid. So, I mowed lawns, much to my parents’ surprise, I mowed lawns the entire summer, in the heat of Michigan, 10-acre lawns working for a real estate company and saved my dollar every day. And at the end —

0:05:39 Debra Schwartz: They paid you a dollar a day?

0:05:41 Jimmy Dillon: Or my \$11 or \$10 or whatever. I got a couple of dollars an hour probably, but I was doing like four- or five-hour mowings, and while I was mowing those lawns I could see that guitar, you know?

0:05:53 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] God, you did — mowing right to that guitar.

0:05:54 Jimmy Dillon: And since then I’ve always had an affinity for mowing lawns — that’s another story. So, at the end of the summer, I had \$125 and I said, “Okay, here we go.” And I took it out of the Farmers and Merchants Bank, we went to South Bend and we went to this pawn shop called Jax Pawn Shop, J-A-X. And there on the wall was hundreds of beautiful guitars; that’s back in the day when pawn shops really ruled. So, I looked up there and he says, “What do you think?” And I said, “I want the red electric right there, 1961 Les Paul.”

0:06:25 Debra Schwartz: And you never really played guitar?

0:06:28 Jimmy Dillon: No.

0:06:28 Debra Schwartz: You just had a vision and you —

0:06:30 Jimmy Dillon: I had a total vision, I was struck by lightning. Yup. So, he said, “Good choice, Les Paul, yeah.”

0:06:38 Debra Schwartz: And for some that may be too young to know Les Paul —

0:06:39 Jimmy Dillon: A Les Paul guitar is a really valuable guitar, you know? Beautiful guitar.

0:06:43 Debra Schwartz: And Les Paul himself is —

0:06:45 Jimmy Dillon: Les Paul and Mary Ford were like — Les Paul was the first guy to do sound on sound recording, in history, “How High the Moon.” So, unbeknownst to me I picked out a really special guitar and I got a funky little amp that my mom pitched in and I left South Bend with the amp and the guitar and the car and I’m like, “Here I go.” So, meanwhile, back to Benton Harbor, I got in a band right away because I had a great guitar [chuckles] but I couldn’t really play. But there was this guy, Dave Hicks, who was about a year ahead of me, who was kind of a prodigy; he really had an ear, and he could really play. So, by watching him and being around him — by this point Bob Dylan and the Beatles hit hard, so we were in like this amazing harmonic convergence of music and creativity, called the middle ’60s — ’63, ’64, ’65. So, Peter Paul and Mary and all that leaving; Bob Dylan, Beatles, Stones coming in — great time to be in a band. First band, The Fugitives, we were called — you remember the TV show *The Fugitive*?

0:07:43 Debra Schwartz: Yes, right, where he’s —

0:07:44 Jimmy Dillon: David Janssen.

0:07:45 Debra Schwartz: Right. He’s —

0:07:46 Jimmy Dillon: Richard Kimble! The one-armed man! [chuckles] So —

0:07:50 Debra Schwartz: And then, endless chase, they’re after him.

0:07:51 Jimmy Dillon: Yup, the endless chase. So, we had this little band, The Fugitives, and we played some parties and stuff, like —

0:07:56 Debra Schwartz: Who’s in it?

0:08:00 Jimmy Dillon: Mike Roberts and Dave Hicks and myself.

0:08:01 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

0:08:02 Jimmy Dillon: You know, it was a small little band, we didn’t know much, but we did our best, we had fun, and we played parties and stuff. And then that band got good. The Fugitives got good and we became like the best band in the town.

0:08:15 Debra Schwartz: How long did it take?

0:08:16 Jimmy Dillon: Couple of years — two, three years. By the time I was like 15, 16, we were playing Shadowland Ballroom, which was it.

0:08:23 Debra Schwartz: Wow!

0:08:24 Jimmy Dillon: Now, Shadowland Ballroom, you have to understand — in the Midwest, all along the coast of Lake Michigan, you probably know this, there were all these great Jewish resorts all along. Many of them got hit by Jewish lightning but that's a whole another story [chuckles] — that was later.

0:08:36: And they weren't all Jewish resorts, but they were resorts along the lake and there was these fabulous big ballrooms with Harry James and Fred Waring and all that. And as it turns out, my mom's family was from Benton Harbor, and I didn't mention that. She grew up there, so that's the reason we settled in Benton Harbor when my dad worked in Chicago; that was the natural fit. She had friends there, so we signed up to relive my mom's childhood, which made sense to her, not to us, as LA surfer kids. So we were like grumbly about being in Michigan, but the guitar saved my life. Let's say that.

0:09:08 Debra Schwartz: How long did it take for you to feel comfortable with your guitar?

0:09:11 Jimmy Dillon: I felt comfortable pretty quick, I mean, I was definitely not a prodigy though — I mean, I had to work hard. But there was so many exciting, great songs. I was playing "Peter Gunn," and all that stuff.

0:09:24 Debra Schwartz: "Peter Gunn?" I'm not familiar —

0:09:26 Jimmy Dillon: [sings] Dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun. Do you wanna hear that?

0:09:28 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, let's hear it!

0:09:29 Jimmy Dillon: [picks up guitar] Okay. Well, you know, I was just trying to think, the Beatles were happening and everything, but if you could — [begins to play song]

0:09:49 Jimmy Dillon: The whole James Bond thing.

0:09:50 Debra Schwartz: Oh yeah!

0:09:50 Jimmy Dillon: And it's the whole Austin Powers thing, right?

0:09:51 Debra Schwartz: Oh yeah.

0:09:52 Jimmy Dillon: And then —

0:09:53 Debra Schwartz: It was great!

0:09:54 Jimmy Dillon: Stack that on top of the fact that the Beatles were coming out

with this amazing stuff, so what a great time to be, to be learning music and being in a band and all that. So basically high school was about playing in a local band. But back to Shadowland, the reason Shadowland was an important place for me to play “Battle of the Bands” and all that, was my mom danced there as a kid, in the ’20s — late ’20s, early ’30s. So it was a real — now it’s of course rock ‘n’ roll bands are playing there, but this was a place that had history. Silver Beach was like an amusement park — like Asbury Park kind of, right?

0:10:26 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm.

0:10:27 Jimmy Dillon: So, it was a cool place to be able to play, and we opened up for bands like Jesse Colin Young and the Youngbloods, the Hollies, Paul Revere and the Raiders, Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, the Flock. All the Chicago blues bands came over ’cause it was only a two-hour drive. Chicago informed the talent that landed in Benton Harbor because it’s a short drive, so a lot of people would be passing by from Detroit to Chicago and they’d play our venue. I got to see some pretty good —

0:10:56 Debra Schwartz: So, it was on the circuit and plus, you could go around —

0:10:57 Jimmy Dillon: It was kind of on the circuit, kind of on the circuit, on the side — Kalamazoo was 20 minutes, Grand Rapids wasn’t too far, but Detroit — between Detroit and Chicago was Benton Harbor.

0:11:07 Debra Schwartz: So, you were with your band, there’s the trio?

0:11:09 Jimmy Dillon: We’re just kids. No, we added a keyboard player, Marty — I can’t remember Marty’s last name but he played keyboard, so we had a keyboard player as well.

0:11:18 Debra Schwartz: So, you’re traveling now, from — just locally —

0:11:19 Jimmy Dillon: We traveled but not very far. We traveled locally to little towns like Dowagiac and Holland, we played the Edgar Allen Poe Club — it was weekends, you know? Basically you get in your dad’s station wagon and off you go to your gig.

0:11:33 Debra Schwartz: So, do you remember any of the songs, that you — your band’s hit?

0:11:38 Jimmy Dillon: Oh yeah, we were doing stuff like — [picks up guitar] you know, sort of — [starts playing song and singing]

0:11:47 Debra Schwartz: Oh!

0:11:53 Jimmy Dillon: And with, obviously, Beatles, Stones, you know — [plays riff on guitar] all that stuff.

0:12:06 Debra Schwartz: Boy, it was a —

0:12:10 Jimmy Dillon: [continues playing] Yeah.

0:12:10 Debra Schwartz: “Day Tripper.”

0:12:18 Jimmy Dillon: That kind of stuff and —

0:12:19 Debra Schwartz: That was really a fresh, alive sound.

0:12:23 Jimmy Dillon: Oh yeah.

0:12:24 Debra Schwartz: And generated a lot of emotion for those listening.

0:12:28 Jimmy Dillon: Then there was some local bands we covered like the Outsiders and the Cryan’ Shames. “Time Won’t Let Me.” [plays and sings a few bars]

0:12:38 Jimmy Dillon: Songs like that. There was some Chicago, Detroit bands. Mitch Ryder, obviously. [plays a few bars]

0:12:50 Jimmy Dillon: All that. So, there was a lot of local Chicago/Detroit stuff besides just the world stuff, the British invasion. So that was cool. Coming up in Michigan, that was my dream was to play, and I never really doubted that I’d be a musician my whole life, a lifetime musician.

0:13:10 Debra Schwartz: You just crawled right into yourself, it seems like.

0:13:11 Jimmy Dillon: But it wasn’t necessarily because I was a prodigy or anything. It wasn’t like that. It was more —

0:13:16 Debra Schwartz: It was your passion.

0:13:17 Jimmy Dillon: It was my passion. And like a deal I made with myself and the universe that, “You’re gonna be a musician. And whatever it takes, you’re gonna do it.”

0:13:26 Debra Schwartz: May I ask, [is] anybody else in your family a musician?

0:13:30 Jimmy Dillon: The only other connection would be my Uncle Jack. And my Uncle Jack was a playwright and a songwriter. He worked with a guy called George Kelly — George Kelly, his niece is Grace Kelly. George Kelly launched the careers of Helen Hayes, Jimmy Durante, people like that. He wrote “Craig’s Wife.” He won a Tony for that. So my uncle was this fabulous gay guy who lived in Santa Monica, as was George Kelly. George Kelly —

0:13:57 Debra Schwartz: And this is your mother or father’s brother?

0:14:00 Jimmy Dillon: This is my mom's brother, John Hiram Hearn, Uncle Jack. And he was really trippy. He was a guy who's in Positano in the winter, in London doing the whole Noël Coward thing — and really brilliant, Latin scholar, spoke four languages. He lived right in our duplex with us in Beverly Hills. So he was an influence in many ways, whether I knew it or not because his life was about the arts. And he was a published writer. So, I think, ultimately, that did affect me, in terms of — in the biz. My dad was a businessman. But he worked in the movie business. So I was exposed to lots and lots of movies. We got to go to the movies all the time for free.

0:14:38 Debra Schwartz: Did your uncle encourage you when you started?

0:14:43 Jimmy Dillon: He wasn't in any way pushy but he — just by his mere presence and his incredible refinement, being a European traveler and all that goes with being a fabulously, eccentric, brilliant, gay writer. Yeah. He encouraged me in that way, because yeah, he just was there. But my mom was really good, in that she was really supportive. She took me to gigs and stuff. And to her credit, she never discouraged me. Or my dad, either. They allowed me to pursue my — but they basically said, "You're on your own. Go, dude. Good luck."

0:15:25 Debra Schwartz: Did they come to your performances?

0:15:26 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, yeah. And I went to the school of hard knocks and dirty socks. I wasn't given anything. I just did it on my own. And that was it.

0:15:33 Debra Schwartz: What kind of student [were you]? Much time for studies?

0:15:36 Jimmy Dillon: Yes. I got good grades, even though I didn't study. I was one of those [kids]. I could read the flap and give you a report. That's my improv. So, once I got out of high school, I was 17 — I moved to Sausalito when I was 17 — I got out of there.

0:15:51 Debra Schwartz: What in the world — ? That's a ways. How — ?

0:15:54 Jimmy Dillon: Well, because my sister, Chloe, was living in Ann Arbor and the whole Ann Arbor explosion, right? So, she was all bohoed out.¹ We went and saw *Monterey Pop*, the movie, in Michigan when I was a senior in high school. She goes, "You know, I think, let's forget LA. Let's go to San Francisco. This looks way cool."

0:16:14 Debra Schwartz: So, we're talking what year now, again?

0:16:15 Jimmy Dillon: 1969.

0:16:16 Debra Schwartz: Oh, yeah.

0:16:17 Jimmy Dillon: So, I was 17 in 1969. I moved here in August of 1969. And so I

¹ That is, living a Bohemian lifestyle.—Jimmy Dillon.

worked as a lifeguard and did all this stuff — saved my money and moved out. My sister already had an apartment in Sausalito right across from the Golden Gate Market. It was Jack London’s place. We had the top floor on that brown building. It was \$300 a month split four ways. So, it worked.

0:16:36 Debra Schwartz: Kind of cool in the summer [chuckles] —

0:16:39 Jimmy Dillon: Looking right out at the bay. Well, I landed here in August of ’69 with my guitar and myself. Just 17, I’m gonna be 18 soon. And my sister worked with Alvin Duskin in North Beach, with the granny boots and the long sweaters. And so she picked me up at the airport and she said, “Well, here’s the thing. Just go down the bay, put your thumb out —.” I go, “My thumb? Okay.” “And you’ll just take Alexander Avenue and go down —.” And she told me where the house was. So, I did. I got picked up by a really hip painter or something, a house painter guy, and I got there. And, “Oh my God! Sausalito! Living color.” I ended up going into the closet and finding this box of — you know?

0:17:21 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. Right. It’s [chuckles] —

0:17:22 Jimmy Dillon: And next thing you know —

0:17:25 Debra Schwartz: Did you wait for your sister?

0:17:26 Jimmy Dillon: I’d never had anything real, as it turned out. I thought I had, living back in Michigan. Oh my God. I was flying, right? I’m by myself; I walked down to the Trident. And there’s the Trident in all its glory, with the girls with the see-through — I mean, the whole thing.

0:17:41 Debra Schwartz: Did that expand on your experience with the —

0:17:43 Jimmy Dillon: Well, first of all, I’m 17 and walking to the Trident and there’s all these gorgeous women with see-through shirts and no bras on because it was “Burn the Bra,” right? So, for me, that was something new. I’m the kid coming from Michigan.

0:17:54 Debra Schwartz: So, now wait. Back to the closet. You imbibed, and you were altered?

0:17:58 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, yeah. I found a little bit of pot in there that, I think, one of my sister’s boyfriends had left there. Well, it turns out it was like Vietnamese weed or something. And you gotta understand, the only thing I’d ever had up to that point was probably God-awful Indiana ragweed that doesn’t even do anything, right?

0:18:14 Debra Schwartz: So you literally just jumped in and thought, “Oh” —

0:18:16 Jimmy Dillon: I said, “Well, I’ll go through a little bit of that.” And literally, it was like, “Whew!” Mind-blowingly different than anything I had ever done. And then,

that along with a sunny day in August, walking on Bridgeway to the Trident, you can imagine what that was like for a 17 year old.

0:18:31 Debra Schwartz: I guess it would leave a little impression.

0:18:34 Jimmy Dillon: It just felt great, it felt great. I thought, “I’m in the right place.” And then, the smells of Marin in the fall. Man, that whole fall of ’69 — and going out to Lagunitas, hitch-hiking, running Alpine Trail, and just sort of that thing that we know called fall in Marin, that we’re experiencing right now actually.

0:18:50 Debra Schwartz: You’re right, that smell —

0:18:51 Jimmy Dillon: The sights and smells, and all that went with it. It was a kinder, gentler Marin then, in the sense that it wasn’t as populated, and the artists that were here were — I don’t know, it was much more boho. And Mill Valley was super chill, it had a drug store; and I mean, it wasn’t like the ’60s here, you know, it was quiet. But yet exciting in the way that you felt like you were on the cusp of something amazing. Crosby, Stills and Nash and all these people walking down the street. So for a young guitarist, it was a fabulous place to be.

0:19:22 Debra Schwartz: You felt you’d come home, I guess?

0:19:24 Jimmy Dillon: I did, I did. I do. ’Cause I spent most of my life in the state of California as it turns out, as my life turned out. I’m a West Coast guy. So that was the beginning of my love affair with Marin County. And going forward from there, I just played all I could, and got to know people, got to know other musicians, and like that.

0:19:48 Debra Schwartz: Did you used to go to Prune Music?

0:19:50 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, I lived at Prune Music. I was there almost every day. Yeah, Mike Bloomfield hanging out — Larry Cragg was my guitar tech from ’69, still is —

0:19:56 Debra Schwartz: I just interviewed him last night.

0:19:57 Jimmy Dillon: Still is.

0:20:00 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:20:00 Jimmy Dillon: In fact, funny story, when I bought my first amp from Prune, I bought a Boogie amp, which is a great amplifier made here in north Marin, and they go, “Okay, your amp’s ready.” And I’m like, “Okay.” He goes, “So are you gonna pick it up?” They said, “What’s your name?” I said, “Dillon, it’s for Dillon.” He goes, “Well, we got two for Dylan.”

0:20:20 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. [chuckles]

0:20:21 Jimmy Dillon: So, one was for Bob Dylan and one was for me [chuckles], which was wild, but, you know, that was Marin.

0:20:26 Debra Schwartz: So did you stay in Sausalito with your sister?

0:20:28 Jimmy Dillon: We stayed in Sausalito for a while. We split it — my sister and my brother lived there; and then we went to Aspen.

0:20:33 Debra Schwartz: Billy, your older brother?

0:20:34 Jimmy Dillon: My brother Billy, yeah.

0:20:35 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:20:36 Jimmy Dillon: And then we went to Aspen, and did a little geographical move. They ended up moving back here. I went back, saw my parents in Michigan, moved back and ended up living in Novato with my brother. We had a little ranch thing on Smith Ranch Road. And so, I've just kind of continued — my Cat Stevens period, mostly acoustic, getting to know that, as a musician and being exposed to all the great music, Van Morrison and — we just did a show, The History of Rock show. I don't know if you saw that. We did it at Sweetwater, me and Paul Liberatore. But we did the entire history of the migration over the bridge and what the music was like —

0:21:10 Debra Schwartz: How the musicians went from San Francisco, then they migrated over to Marin?

0:21:12 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah. We covered everybody from Van to Jerry Garcia to Jesse Colin Young, and then we just kept going, all the way till now. So yeah, that was fun. And then, eventually, I spent some time up in the Russian River because I wanted to do the “back to the woods” thing, and that helped me develop too, in terms of — I did a little teaching. By that time I had gotten pretty good at guitar, and I did a little teaching, which later was to serve me way, way down the road. So, that was that, and then I went over to Maui. I went to Maui and lived on Makena Beach in '71, with hair down to here [gestures] and kind of felt —

0:21:50 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm. Wasn't that the nudist beach at the time?

0:21:51 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, well, it still is, kind of.

0:21:53 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:21:53 Jimmy Dillon: But yeah, we were on Little Beach, yeah.

0:21:55 Debra Schwartz: Little Beach. There's Big Beach, and Little Beach and —

0:21:56 Jimmy Dillon: Well, everybody lived naked, yeah. So that was '71.

0:22:00 Debra Schwartz: Rough tides sometimes out there.

0:22:03 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, yeah. But it was, for me, it was Hawaii. So I did —

0:22:08 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, well, Boz Scaggs was over —

0:22:10 Jimmy Dillon: That was later. I played with him over there at the Blue Max.

0:22:13 Debra Schwartz: Give me a list of some of the people when you were living — you come here to Marin at 17 years old, you basically come to an area where there's an explosion of music, and so, who are some of the people you played with at that time?

0:22:29 Jimmy Dillon: Well, I didn't play with anybody famous at that point, 'cause I was just — my one big moment was, I went to the Keystone Korner, if you remember that in the city, that was — there were other Keystones, but the Keystone Korner was in the city; and Elvin Bishop, no not Elvin, Mike Bloomfield and his band were playing there every Monday night. So I went there, 'cause, you gotta understand, Mike Bloomfield was up there with Clapton, for me, for a guitar player, and that Electric Flag and Paul Butterfield —

0:22:54: So I went there to watch them, and Nick Gravenites was singing and everything, and we'll get to the full circle 40 years later in a bit, because there is a finish to this story but it's 40 years later. So, I'm watching Mike Bloomfield and I'm like, "Wow! Mike Bloomfield, this is amazing." For a kid from Chicago, that's where he's from, who'd been living near Chicago, and he goes, "Does anybody wanna jam? Play? 'Cause this is a Monday night, that's what we do here." And I'm like, "Uhhh —"

0:23:20 Debra Schwartz: Hand goes up, tentatively.

0:23:21 Jimmy Dillon: Hand goes up, about peeing my pants. So, I go up and he takes off his legendary Les Paul, which is complete Holy Grail stuff, and puts it on me and I'm like, "Oh!" and Nick Gravenites leans over and says, "Just play it simple, you'll be fine." Which I did, played a couple of Albert King licks, and — but that was a moment for me.

0:23:41 Debra Schwartz: It's kind of like being knighted.

0:23:42 Jimmy Dillon: It was like being knighted, yeah, because it was just a moment.

0:23:45 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:23:45 Jimmy Dillon: So I don't have a lot of star stories about that, other than just being a spectator and seeing great music.

0:23:51 Debra Schwartz: Well, I remember interviewing Larry Cragg, and he talked about the jam sessions that would take place in Prune Music and —

0:23:56 Jimmy Dillon: Oh yeah, and Bloomfield was there all the time.

0:23:58 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:23:58 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, and all those guys and —

0:24:00 Debra Schwartz: You obviously were inspired by these musicians.

0:24:03 Jimmy Dillon: I was inspired, yeah. I went to the Fillmore a bunch and saw like a lot of great shows. I got to see a lot of great shows that were happening then. And also just to be around the music, and with Jerry Garcia and Mike Bloomfield, and all those different people coming in and out, Van Morrison — just showing up at the Lion's Share and there he is, playing. There was a lot of that going on, so, that was very inspiring. Yeah.

0:24:25 Debra Schwartz: You know, you're a guitar player, you talk about your guitar playing, but you're a beautiful singer too.

0:24:29 Jimmy Dillon: Thanks.

0:24:30 Debra Schwartz: How did you develop that?

0:24:31 Jimmy Dillon: Well, the singing, you know, I always sang backup in my band, the band when I was a kid growing up. But, then when I started playing acoustic guitar I realized I needed to develop my singing to accompany myself on the guitar. So, it was just kind of an organic process. I never really was formally trained, but I probably emulated all my favorite singers along the way, whether it was Elvis Costello or — you know we're all a culmination of all our influences before we find our own true voice. And so, it was all a journey for me towards that. Taking the things I like, cafeteria style, along the way as a player, you know — Clapton, people that we obviously grew up with. But then, I got into, like heavy into, the blues thing, slide guitar and rootsy stuff early, really early, like 18.

0:25:16 Debra Schwartz: What kind of early — 'cause, I mean, that's really — you've got a definite —

0:25:19 Jimmy Dillon: That's a part of my wheelhouse, yeah.

0:25:20 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:25:21 Jimmy Dillon: I mean, I've definitely explored — I've recorded in Cuba, I've traveled all over the world, and I've explored other kinds of music. I was in a reggae band for 20 years. But at the center of that, and we'll get to that when we talk about my play *Ascension of the Blues*, it all was informed by my journey on that. But, yeah, Blues had a baby and they called it Rock 'n' Roll, so you can't avoid it. If you want to be a

good rocker —

0:25:43 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] Blues had a baby and they called it Rock ‘n’ Roll.

0:25:45 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, that’s Muddy Waters. And, it’s true, because all music, all Western music in America is informed by the blues. It just is. You can’t get away from it. It doesn’t matter what it is. It’s probably from Mali originally, but that’s a whole different story. So, yeah, the blues is a big part of my coming up and it always stayed in the center of things. Then, I started writing right away, I was a composer. I started writing songs right away. I’ve always been involved in composing and song writing, so, I love that.

0:26:13 Debra Schwartz: Is that a difficult process for you or is it just a river runs through you?

0:26:16 Jimmy Dillon: No, it’s interesting — it’s a river runs through me, yeah. I’m just that way, anyway. I don’t fight it, and I don’t subscribe to the notion that you have to be suffering.

0:26:27 Jimmy Dillon: Part of the story is that — you know, when we talk about the blues and our influences on our journey as musicians, and singers, and composers, and whatever — that sort of a cumulative process, I think, as a musician or as an artist, that we pick up along the way, and then we add that to our palette.

0:26:49 Debra Schwartz: It’s like collective learning or something.

0:26:50 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, it just kind of comes in. But, the truth is (and I know this because I lived and toured in Europe, which we’ll get to later): in the world, America may not be loved for everything, but we are revered and loved for our roots music, for our authentic — whether it’s country, rockabilly, blues, you name it. Everywhere in the world they really — I know that first hand — they really embrace us for that. They are romanced with it. So it’s kind of interesting, in the same breath, that the blues players had to leave and go to Europe, and the jazz players, to be discovered. We had these incredible resources and that’s what the British invasion was, of course. They resold us our own R&B and blues, with good-looking guys with haircuts.

0:27:32: So, the point is that, whether you know it or not, that’s it in your bones as an American. We grew up listening to that radio, and all that stuff. It’s in us. It’s in our DNA at this point, because we grew up with it. In Germany, it’s like [imitates German singing] but that’s different; we know how to sing it low and swing. That’s because it’s in our airwaves and in our DNA now. It’s part of us. For me, as a keeper of the flame, it’s important to pass that on. I’m not an old black guy from Mississippi, but I’m black Irish and I’ve got the soul, I’ve got the grit.

0:28:09 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, I meant to ask you about your heritage.

0:28:10 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, we're from County Kerry. I'm Black Irish, which means that we're South of Ireland, we're kind of dark and swarthy, and I guess there was some Spaniards landed on the —

0:28:21 Debra Schwartz: Instead of bright blue, you've got kind of green-greyish guys.

0:28:23 Jimmy Dillon: I think that Spanish Armada thing, maybe, I don't know [chuckles] but maybe they found their way. But that being said — it's like Daniel Day Lewis is Black Irish, we have sort of different — but yeah, then the Irish thing too, for me, I mean, I feel that in me, very much, that whole lilting lyrical, poetic, Irish part is a big part of who I am because, I have Irish blood in me. I have an Irish passport, actually.

0:28:45 Debra Schwartz: Really?

0:28:46 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, so that's the whole other thing, but that happened later. But Dillon is a very Irish name.

0:28:51 Debra Schwartz: Yes, indeed.

0:28:53 Jimmy Dillon: So yeah, we're strong in that respect. But, back to being in Marin at that time, all those influences being — hanging out at the clubs, like the Lion's Share. I remember seeing Van Morrison at the Lion's Share. It was just mind-blowingly good. It was just great. The outside stuff with Tam, all the stuff that we got to experience as Marin-ites or Mill Valley-ites or whatever, a really cool time, the '70s.

0:29:22 Debra Schwartz: Well, one of the things that makes this area so very special is its open spaces and the natural beauty of the mountain. How has that influenced you?

0:29:30 Jimmy Dillon: Oh God, in so many ways. I mentioned that I just was intoxicated by the sights and smells of Marin. A young boy coming from Michigan to this was like black and white to living color. But, beyond that, later on, I found that the mountain has always been a great inspiration and kind of a way to find solutions to songs or creative — or even just personal things. I've done a lot of mountain biking on the — not so much hiking, but mountain biking on the mountain. And when I find that whenever I'm stuck on a song or something, I just grab my bike and go up the mountain. By the time I come down, I can't wait to get down because I've got a lyric or a thought or — I don't know, it just washes me in that way.

0:30:14 Debra Schwartz: Isn't that an interesting phenomenon?

0:30:16 Jimmy Dillon: It just does.

0:30:16 Debra Schwartz: A lot of people experience that. It settles you, it calibrates you.

0:30:22 Jimmy Dillon: It just makes everything in right size somehow and kind of —

0:30:26 Debra Schwartz: It brings you to yourself somehow.

0:30:28 Jimmy Dillon: Peaceful. Yeah, it does. And boy, how's that for some magic? That's big magic there. And we're living it. So, no matter what happens downtown, we still have the mountain — and we have to honor the mountain for that.

0:30:41 Debra Schwartz: And 85 miles of protected open space.

0:30:44 Jimmy Dillon: Amazing.

0:30:44 Debra Schwartz: Yes. And you have a lovely setting here in Mill Valley.

0:30:48 Jimmy Dillon: I do. And I feel the mountain here very much. You know, where we are, where we're sitting. So this is a great place to be.

0:30:53 Debra Schwartz: I recall in the late '70s into the '80s, at various times seeing your bands play. So let's just talk a little about your band that you've created.

0:31:11 Jimmy Dillon: Probably the first band of interest was called The Edge. And that was late '70s. Now, I had been on Maui prior to that and bought land on Maui and built a house and did an album with Michael Pinder from the Moody Blues. There's a whole other segment we're skipping over.

0:31:25 Debra Schwartz: Ooh, well, we can go back to that after we talk about your band.

0:31:27 Jimmy Dillon: We should, because there was a moment in time, a sort of two-, three-year window, where I moved to Maui, bought land, built a house —

0:31:36 Debra Schwartz: Ulupalakua time, up there?

0:31:38 Jimmy Dillon: It was in Olinda.

0:31:38 Debra Schwartz: Olinda, okay.

0:31:39 Jimmy Dillon: And I was playing at the Blue Max in Lahaina. I was in the house band, playing with Boz and Linda Ronstadt was playing there. We played with Elton John there. We played with all these different people. Bob Marley played in town. So, that was a cool time to be in Maui. But later, after that, was my first bona fide band in Marin, it was called The Edge, with Lorin Rowan — you know, Lorin Rowan, Peter Rowan, and all those guys. Ozzie Ahlers, keyboard player for Van Morrison, and Jesse Colin Young. And so, we had this great little band. It was truly a band. And we lived out in Stinson, and we wrote together, played Uncle Charlie's and [unintelligible], the

Keystone, toured with the Beach Boys, and we had some level of success.

0:32:16 Debra Schwartz: Toured with the Beach Boys? Yikers!

0:32:19 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, we did a little tour. Well, it was basically The Edge and Huey Lewis and the American Express: Who's gonna make it? Well, I guess we know who *made it*. Their thing was, "Your stuff's just not commercial enough. It's way too left-of-center." I think [this] is what disallowed us from being probably as big as the — it's hard to say. The whole success thing is — well, how you define it, is the other thing.

0:32:43 Debra Schwartz: But you are known around here for The Edge.

0:32:45 Jimmy Dillon: Again, we were a little more on The Police/Marley side of things than on the Huey Lewis, which was much more focused, commercial — I don't want to say bubblegum, 'cause it's not bubblegum, but it's bubblegum. [chuckles] No, it's more — it was the times.

0:33:03 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:33:03 Jimmy Dillon: And our stuff was way more boho, left-of-center.

[pause in the interview]

0:33:14 Debra Schwartz: We left off talking about your band, The Edge.

0:33:18 Jimmy Dillon: Right, The Edge. I met Lorin Rowan and Ozzie Ahlers, and Mark Stein, Jeff Myer, later. It started out as the average beach band. We were all out in Stinson and it was a fun time. And then we became The Edge and we got serious. We moved over the hill and played at Uncle Charlie's, this town — as I mentioned, we toured with the Beach Boys. We had a level of success that was primarily pretty local California. We did some gigs in Hawaii, but the thing that's important about The Edge was that it was a bona fide band. It was a real band. We lived near each other. We wrote and sang together and composed. It was a very creative — extremely creative cauldron, as it were. So, that was fun. And that was really the '80s for me. That was really the '80s in Marin.

0:34:03 Debra Schwartz: Did you have a particular song or something that people identified with or assigned, that maybe you could —

0:34:09 Jimmy Dillon: [chuckles] We had a song called "Surf's Up but You're Not." It became a bumper sticker in Marin for years, from KTIM. It's kind of a —

0:34:19 Debra Schwartz: Give us a little.

0:34:33 Jimmy Dillon: [plays opening bars of song] That was kind of a fun, like really energetic type of The Edge. But The Edge also did more sort of compelling, kind of singer-songwriter kind of songs as well. We did a lot of ska — [plays guitar]

0:35:00 Jimmy Dillon: I like to say we were sort of the bastard child of The Police and the Stones. Because Lorin has the Sting-like voice and I'm more of a Keith kind of rocking dude. So when you mix that together, you've got The Edge. So, The Edge, for me, creatively here in Marin, was a great period of time. It was really fun. And then, I have to fast forward a little to the end of the '80s. I moved to New York. I traveled a lot, sort of on my own. I always kind of wanted to do something different, something new. And sure enough I met Clarence Clemons. And I became his musical director.

0:35:35 Debra Schwartz: And for those who don't know who Clarence Clemons is —

0:35:37 Jimmy Dillon: Clarence was the saxophonist for Bruce Springsteen in the E Street Band for many, many years. He passed away a couple of years ago.

0:35:41 Debra Schwartz: He was just huge back then.

0:35:44 Jimmy Dillon: Being with Clarence was interesting. I met him through a few other musician friends locally. He and I hit it off. We really hit it off. We started writing together and it was fun; we collaborated. I think I had mentioned Mike Pinder from the Moody Blues; I don't think I mentioned that on here.

0:36:04 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, you did.

0:36:05 Jimmy Dillon: That was interesting, and then I think my next major collaboration with someone, of stature like that, physically and otherwise, was Clarence, and we had a lot of fun and it ended up — Clarence became kind of a — just a great guy for me to work with and for. And we played the Sweetwater in Mill Valley. Every month we would do one weekend, a Friday, Saturday, two shows a night and it was pandemonium. *Pandemonium*, really great. I mean, here you got this band that was like made for larger venues playing little old Sweetwater, and the place was humming. The walls were vibrating. It was great.

0:36:42 Debra Schwartz: That is the beauty of the Sweetwater and Mill Valley, where it's just a —

0:36:46 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, yeah, it's intimate.

0:36:48 Debra Schwartz: Intimate, available and unique setting for people to have access to really big names.

0:36:52 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, and is there anything more thrilling than seeing someone of a high stature, a high level of talent in a small place? It's very special, you know? And we have that here in Marin. We've had that over the years, which is really great. So, that was an important aspect of my creative life in 1989 when I met Clarence. It changed the trajectory of my career, totally. So, we started touring the world. We're in Europe, we're in Italy, we're in Canada —

0:37:19 Debra Schwartz: So, just you and Clarence together or did you —

0:37:21 Jimmy Dillon: No, full band. The Red Bank Rockers was a full band. The band changed a lot. Darrell Verduco on drums. We had Eric McCann on bass from The Edge, and who I now work with. Austin de Lone on keyboard, who was a local legend from Mill Valley. The Naughty Preacher on keyboards, Lawrence Rubin, who since passed away.

0:37:45 Debra Schwartz: The Naughty Preacher, this I don't know.

0:37:46 Jimmy Dillon: The Naughty Preacher. He was the Naughty Preacher. You figure that one out. Lawrence Rubin.

0:37:49 Debra Schwartz: Okay. [chuckles] I don't wanna even go there, I don't think. [laughs]

0:37:55 Jimmy Dillon: [affects preacher's intonation] "The Lord has spoken." And we had Cynthia Green, a great gospel singer in backgrounds. So, it was a fun band and we had a lot of experience, where we got to play Bill Clinton's inauguration together, and the band for that was fun. I was the musical director for Clarence's band — here we are in D.C. for '93, right? Clinton's first inaugural. Talk about changing of the guard. Clarence didn't tell me that we're going to this fabulous gig in D.C. I'm like, "Okay, whatever." And I get there, and on stage in the band is The Band, in its entirety: Levon Helm, Rick Danko was still alive, without Robbie Robertson. It was Dr. John on piano, Kim Wilson on harmonica from the T-birds; the host and hostess are Don Johnson and Melanie Griffith, who were really big at that time.

0:38:49 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, *Miami Vice*, I think, was coming. Or was that past —

0:38:51 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah. Lead guitar, Jimmy Dillon, rhythm guitar, Bob Dylan.

0:38:58 Debra Schwartz: Whoa!

0:38:58 Jimmy Dillon: I mean, if you don't think that was surreal. Steve Still's guitar and vocals, great horn section.

0:39:04 Debra Schwartz: Did you get that on video?

0:39:06 Jimmy Dillon: I did. I did get it on video.

0:39:08 Debra Schwartz: We better add this one to the bio. [chuckles]

0:39:09 Jimmy Dillon: It's wild. Yeah, yeah. It's in that show, I mentioned, the business of passions in there. So my point is that I think about Clarence as a big man, he had a big heart and he was well-loved by a lot of people, and especially in the business,

'cause he played a lot of people's records, besides Springsteen's. He played on "Freeway of Love," he played "Unchain my Heart," which — Clarence was a sound unto himself. He really had that sound.

0:39:34 Debra Schwartz: What's his sound? How would you describe it?

0:39:36 Jimmy Dillon: You know, it's funny like in the movie *The Commitments* where they said, "Well, we want you to sound like Clarence Clemons." Well, his sound was basically King Curtis, is where that sound came from.

0:39:47 Debra Schwartz: I don't know.

0:39:47 Jimmy Dillon: And Clarence extrapolated on it. King Curtis is a great sax player. "Soul Serenade" was King Curtis. I recorded Clarence many times in our own little studio. At one time I was in the booth with him, and he had all this jewelry on and this stuff hanging in bones and his — he would make these noises, and you realize that's the sound of his sax. All that's going on when he blows the sax, and that's why it sounds like it does. It was just a whole physical — he was like a chief. He was like an African chief. So, he and I had a lot of adventures. We toured and played together for 20 years.

0:40:24: So that was a fun experience for me. But on my tour, one of my tours in Europe with Clarence — I really just loved the idea of touring in Europe. I wanted to be that guy. That jazz guy, that blues guy, that American roots guy that played in Europe and became a hit in New York. So [chuckles] in like 1990 — I think it was '93 or '94 — I went over there on my own and I took my guitars and my little *Bad and Blue* CD, which is my first CD, wasn't even a CD yet, it was still a cassette, and I said, "Why not just start, like go right to the top?" And I went right to Montreux Jazz Festival, booked a room at the Palace Hotel for a week, and I thought, "I'm just gonna wing it and see what happens."

0:41:06 Debra Schwartz: You mean to say, "Hey, I'm here," and —

0:41:08 Jimmy Dillon: I'm here and I played in Harry's. Harry's Bar is a famous bar in Montreux. I played there every night with Austin and just kind of met people, went for a week and stayed for like four months. I ended up moving to Salzburg, got a gig there, got another gig in Italy. Austin went home, I stayed and I got a record deal in Europe that summer. I ended up sending my jeep and moving to the South of France and that was — the next eight years of my life were spent touring Europe, on my own.

0:41:38 Debra Schwartz: But you didn't have an agent though, right? So, how did you get the gigs?

0:41:43 Jimmy Dillon: I got it. The way I made the connection was, I had that video from Dylan and playing with Springsteen and stuff. I had a little VCR; I think I got one. And I sent that to a club owner in Salzburg that I met through a friend and he'd liked it and he said, "Listen, if you come over here, no guarantees, but I think I might be able to

book you,” and he was really very innovative. His name was Hubert Moser. And so, when I was in Montreux I called him, I said, “Dude, this is great and everything but I can’t afford to stay in Montreux. Oh, my God.” And he said, “Well, if you could take a train to Salzburg, I think I can put you up and we may be able to come up with something for you.”

0:42:19: So I did, and I ended up working in a place called the Rockhouse in Salzburg that he managed. And you have to understand that in Europe, maybe you know this already, but in Europe all clubs close in the summer and the beer gardens open. That’s how it’s done. So he said, “What if we did like a Blue Monday? It might be weird but maybe it will go. Let’s try it.” So we did Blue Monday and like two people showed up, the next week, six people showed up, and the next week 20, and then, by the end of summer, it was packed. And I was playing the big room and I’d sort of done like, “The Beatles in Hamburg.” I used to play at this little place called — ironically called KKK, a blues club. [chuckles]

0:43:00 Debra Schwartz: Oops!

0:43:01 Jimmy Dillon: Koffler, Koffler, and Koffler.

0:43:02 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, didn’t have the same meaning there.

0:43:04 Jimmy Dillon: No, nothing does.

0:43:05 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:43:05 Jimmy Dillon: You get that all the time in Europe. So, I played there on weekends, and I played Mondays at the Rockhouse in Salzburg, and then I did a little pickup bands from American musicians from New Orleans that lived in Vienna. I just did this whole ragtag tour, van tour of Central Europe, Czechoslovakia, and all that.

0:43:22 Debra Schwartz: Flying by the seat of your pants.

0:43:25 Jimmy Dillon: Flying by the seat of my pants, got heard in Munich, record company heard me, signed me, came back to Mill Valley — they ordered like some obscene amount of CDs like, I don’t know, like 3,000 CDs, and paid cash for them. In those days, the dollar was really strong, so they were paying me \$9 for a CD. They were selling for like \$28 over there, American money. So it was a great deal, and I said, “Well, heck, that’s better than a 100 bucks a night at Sweetwater, I think.” And so, I sublet my house in Mill Valley, the one on Cottage.

0:43:55 Debra Schwartz: Over on Cottage, right.

0:43:57 Jimmy Dillon: And I moved to Europe. I sent my Jeep, and I moved to the south of France to a little village called Roquebrun. And right above Monaco ’cause I had a friend that lived there, Tom Connor, who’s really a great guy. And I played in Sardinia.

That summer, I was over there, I played festivals in Sardinia, I took ferry boats all over them. Man, it was a wild summer. But that's how I got established over there.

0:44:18 Debra Schwartz: So you've really sort of pollinated a lot of the world with your music and —

0:44:24 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, yeah. Well, Europe was huge for me. That was a big part of my story, and I ended up recording and marketing more records over there and did well. I sold 30-40,000 units over in Europe. That was the '90s for me, really. It was Europe.

0:44:41 Debra Schwartz: You must have made a lot of connections and friends over there?

0:44:43 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, yeah. I mean, I toured with Joe Cocker, Dr. John, Chaka Khan, played festivals. No gig too small, no paycheck too large. I played gigs like the Unfassbar that was the size of this room with 90 people in it.

0:45:00 Debra Schwartz: And this room's about, for those that can't —

0:45:01 Jimmy Dillon: Like 20' by 20' or something, 25' by 20'.

0:45:02 Debra Schwartz: No, I'd say, well, 20' by 15', maybe.

0:45:05 Jimmy Dillon: 20' by 15', yeah. It's literally this small, and it was in the middle of a cow pasture. And then, I played big festivals, toured with Buddy Guy and Luther Allison, all these great people, so, it was one day chicken, next day feathers, you know? That was the '90s.

0:45:18 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. That was the '90s.

0:45:20 Jimmy Dillon: But it was fun.

0:45:21 Debra Schwartz: For those of us that were living in Mill Valley at that time, it always appeared to me you were popping in and out.

0:45:26 Jimmy Dillon: I was in and out, yeah.

0:45:27 Debra Schwartz: I could never tell if you were here or there.

0:45:30 Jimmy Dillon: I wasn't really here. I was really in Europe, most of the time.

0:45:32 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:45:33 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah. It was great.

0:45:33 Debra Schwartz: But you seem to come back?

0:45:34 Jimmy Dillon: Mm-hmm. Yeah. It was fun though.

0:45:36 Debra Schwartz: It kept calling you back.

0:45:38 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, it did. Well, it's a great place to come back to. It's always gonna be home, to some regard, but — so yeah, but that was great. And so then what happened is, after X amount of years in Europe, and I really did enjoy it, I got homesick. I got homesick for America and I forgot to mention that I bought a house in 1990 on the beach in South Haven, Michigan, which is near where I partly grew up. I'd been renting it out and stuff, and so, in 1999, I got back to Mill Valley and I decided to spend some time in Michigan 'cause my parents were there and I wanted to take care of them.

0:46:11 Debra Schwartz: They're getting older now.

0:46:12 Jimmy Dillon: They're getting older, so I moved in to my little house and I ended up staying the summer there and really enjoyed it. And Mill Valley — at that time the club scene here was really quiet, not much going on. And so, I gave up my house in Mill Valley. It was hard to do, but I did. I felt like it was a sea change for me 'cause I wanted to reinvent myself in some way, but didn't know exactly how. So, on New Year's Eve 1999, I came up with a concept of a play, a bluesical.

0:46:40 Debra Schwartz: A play?

0:46:41 Jimmy Dillon: I wanted to play the entire story —

0:46:41 Debra Schwartz: And now comes your playwriting career.

0:46:44 Jimmy Dillon: I came up with this idea. I had seen *Ain't Nothin' but the Blues*, which I think won a Tony, off-Broadway or whatever. But the problem with that thing was, it was great, but it only went to the '40s and then it stopped. And I thought, what if I wrote a play that went all the way from the birth of the Blues in West Africa, the Great Crossing all the way till now and then back to Africa for world music. So, I did. And I wrote it, and at the same time I thought, "What if I started a nonprofit music program, charitable music program for kids?" Because at that time — this was five years before *School of Rock* — there were no schools of rock. There were no contemporary music programs like that.

0:47:23 Jimmy Dillon: So I felt that there was a need for that, and I felt that I had a responsibility of someone who's been — music's been pretty good to. I want to pass on my craft to the next generation of performers. And so, we built Blue Star Theater in the middle of South Haven from an old factory. I wrote *Ascension of the Blues*, and we performed it in an old Baptist church.

0:47:46 Debra Schwartz: *Ascension of the Blues* is your play?

0:47:48 Jimmy Dillon: Yes, my play, *Ascension of the Blues*. And that caught on. That ran in Detroit and outside Chicago and Grand Rapids. I performed it all around the Midwest, and at the same time, what was ironic was that the music that we honored in *Ascension of the Blues* is the very music that we teach kids in the Blue Star. So there's the connection.

0:48:07 Debra Schwartz: Did Jack Black know about this? 'Cause he's got —

0:48:09 Jimmy Dillon: I don't know, maybe. That was five years before that.

0:48:12 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:48:13 Jimmy Dillon: So I was surprised when that movie came out. I went, "Wow!"

0:48:15 Debra Schwartz: *School of Rock*, right?

0:48:15 Jimmy Dillon: But we had Chuck Leavell teaching, we had people like Bonnie Raitt, wrote our first check to us. So what happened is I did it in Michigan for a couple of years and then I realized that I missed Marin very much and I'd been back and forth a lot. And so I came out here and I played at the Sweetwater and I showed a video of our kids. And somebody, a good friend of mine here, said, "Hey, if you bring that out here, I think it would really do well." And I go, "Don't you have that here? I mean, it's San Francisco, you gotta be —"

0:48:47: And she's like, "Not really. We don't really have — we got Blue Bear but that's not a kid summer program like this is." So I brought it out here. I came back from Michigan with a little gift called Blue Star under my arm and we did it at the Playhouse in San Anselmo, perfect place. It was just such a great old Marin — talk about an old Marin, a 100-year old Shakespearian, you know, redwood thing. And that's basically the last 15 years of my life, I've been doing that. That's my summer job.

0:49:14 Debra Schwartz: But the *Ascension of the Blues*? The Throckmorton Theater —

0:49:17 Jimmy Dillon: *Ascension of the Blues*, we brought that.

0:49:18 Debra Schwartz: What about the bringing it back to Mill Valley?

0:49:20 Jimmy Dillon: I did. We did three runs, I think, at the Throck, and then we did a final show at Bimbo's, and that was really fun. We filmed it, it's online. Yeah, that was fun.

0:49:30 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm. We'll add that link too.

0:49:31 Jimmy Dillon: And you know, the thing is, I mean, I got looked at by everybody from House of Blues to Broadway to you name it. But as you probably know, mounting a full charge theatrical performance is not only expensive, but it's time-consuming. I think the *Ascension of the Blues* is as good or better than *Ain't Nothing but the Blues*. And we got 22 people, Maria Muldaur, Dan Hicks, I mean, it's a rotating cast of characters because every time we'd write in a Marvin Gaye or Al Green, we'd have a different singer come in. Well, what I did was, for every song that was iconic, every "Hoochie Coochie Man," every, you know, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," we wrote an original song in the vernacular of the decade it was in. So, it's not only classics that show you where you are in the ladders of history, what year you're in, but there's also original music in there too, to keep it more kind of interesting, you know, more spicy.

0:50:30: And that's where I met my wife, right before that, we did it here and she — my wife Kelli, who's been a great inspiration for me. She kind of took me to school on the African part of it, 'cause she's very disciplined in West African/Brazilian/Haitian dance. And she knew so much more about the birth of the blues than I did in the African part.

0:50:49: So, she wrote a whole part of the intro which is very Steven Spielberg, you know, supernatural kind of, in Africa, that was a prelude to the great crossing in the field hollers and the jazz in New Orleans and all that. So I thought it was important because we actually ended there too. We'd go all the way around to Mandela and the whole world music thing in Africa and all that. So, it was a very fascinating journey and Kelli created all the costumes and choreographed it and danced in it and did the whole New Orleans and all that. So that was a really fun thing because — really, to back up, New Year's Eve 1999, my decision was, what do you wanna do with your life? And I thought, I don't wanna play joints and bars anymore, I wanna play in the great theaters of the world. And so, I wrote a play.

0:51:34 Debra Schwartz: You really don't seem encumbered by resistance. You just seem to —

0:51:40 Jimmy Dillon: No, oh God no.

0:51:41 Debra Schwartz: You seem rather weightless in that regard. You just go for it.

0:51:44 Jimmy Dillon: Well, I prefer to go towards the solution than stay in the problem, in terms of — if I'm stuck somewhere, I just try and — I don't know, I got a lot of Libra in me. And I just kind of go to — I've always been sort of a flier. You know, a leap-and-the-net-will-appear kind of guy.

0:52:02 Debra Schwartz: Yes, so, now you've got your camp, which you're very involved with still?

0:52:09 Jimmy Dillon: Well, no, we actually sunsetted our camp last year.

0:52:11 Debra Schwartz: Oh, did you?

0:52:12 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, we came to the realization — a girl named Tracy Blackman, who's my main teacher, who we're now in a band with, Carlos and Cindy Santana — we've been working together in a project, that's another — that's more recent. But she and Ted O'Connell are two of my main teachers and Ozzie Ahlers was my main backup, kind of admin guy, which has been really great. But Ted passed away last year. And when Ted passed away, the combination of that and the fact that there are a bunch of kids camps now — our time, you know, it was time.

0:52:44 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:52:44 Jimmy Dillon: So, I sunsetted that and I'm really proud of it, and it's been a really satisfying, rich experience teaching kids. But what's interesting for me on a personal note is, teaching kids at Blue Star is what led me to my online teaching presence now.

0:53:01 Debra Schwartz: Now that's —

0:53:01 Jimmy Dillon: They really trained me. The kids did.

0:53:03 Debra Schwartz: So that's something for those that don't know about it, you teach online guitar?

0:53:08 Jimmy Dillon: I do.

0:53:09 Debra Schwartz: And I'm gonna ask you, 'cause I went online today and looked in YouTube and I have to say, you've got quite a presence there. You're quite grounded and you play beautifully and there's a sense that anybody watching could really do this. So, if you don't mind grabbing your guitar for a moment —

0:53:26 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, yeah.

0:53:28 Debra Schwartz: Will you talk about some of the things you can learn, like turnarounds?

0:53:32 Jimmy Dillon: [picks up guitar] Well, turnaround, yeah. That's a really recent one I did, and that's important because I found that, in my teaching and my DVDs and my downloads and streaming, I've done sort of three basic formats. One is "Solo Acoustic Guitar," which is all about acoustic. And then, "Rockin' the Blues and Slide," which is more like slide guitar open tunings and —

0:53:52 Debra Schwartz: When you say things, it's great —

0:53:55 Jimmy Dillon: Let me grab a slide here.

0:53:57 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

0:53:58 Jimmy Dillon: I'll give you a little example of what I'm talking about. [gets up and walks out of room to look for a slide]

0:54:01 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] He's walking away talking. He's gonna give an example of what he's talking about.

0:54:10 Jimmy Dillon: So yeah, what I found in my experience with teaching — and again, the kids kind of took me to school on that one — was a regular acoustic guitar that you hear, you know like [begins playing] —

0:54:26 Jimmy Dillon: Just kind of singer-songwriter picking, you know, finger picking. And then, when we talk about slide — [continues playing]

0:54:37 Jimmy Dillon: That kind of a blues thing, right.

0:54:45 Jimmy Dillon: So, that was my second project. And my third one was called “Eclectic Electric,” and that's where I taught kind of a Mark Knopfler, lyrical — [plays an example]

0:54:58 Jimmy Dillon: But on electric with a fingerstyle, almost flamenco. [plays] That's the eclectic part. So, those three projects were kind of my, kind of the bones of my teaching. And I included, you know [plays] Latin. I've made a few trips to Cuba and recorded down there. And all this stuff, by the way, is on my website jimmydillon.com. You can find all this stuff; all my songs, all of the musical map from Ireland to Cuba and everywhere in between. South America — [plays a few bars]

0:55:36 Jimmy Dillon: But what I found was, for some reason, the acoustic blues thing has really been a sweet spot for me. People really like it. You'll see on my — all the hits that I got on there. So, I wanted to — [plays a few bars] I really wanted to concentrate on that, when I got into my most recent endeavor, which is working with a company called Udemy. U-D-E-M-Y. Yeah, Udemy.

0:56:00 Debra Schwartz: Yes, Udemy.

0:56:00 Jimmy Dillon: U-D-E-M-Y. Great little company from San Francisco — they're a startup, really. But they're really clean, kind of fun marketplace for learning. And so I recently started working with them and I've been enjoying the process. And Ultimate Acoustic Blues Guitar is my product with them, and it's on their website. There's a real passion for acoustic blues guitar out there, it turns out.

0:56:29 Debra Schwartz: Uh-huh.

0:56:30 Jimmy Dillon: And so I wanted to stick to one thing that I knew really would do well. And that's why I most recently had focused on that. Sometimes I sing. I just try to tell a story and make it colorful 'cause teaching can be like watching paint dry. If it's too pedantic and stiff, doesn't work. People just wanna have fun; they don't wanna get bogged down with theory and all that. That's all available elsewhere; that's academic stuff. What they want is the secret sauce. [plays and sings the blues] That kind of stuff. So that's what I try to pass on and make it fun when I'm doing it.

0:57:24 Debra Schwartz: You say, you can learn turnarounds.

0:57:27 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, turnarounds, yeah. A turnaround in blues, right, is like — [starts playing] 'cause when you're in the blues, you're playing — and then you go to a four chord [continues playing] and then you kind of go to your five [keeps playing] — and you wanna finalize it.

0:57:52 Debra Schwartz: That's your turnaround.

0:57:53 Jimmy Dillon: That's your turnaround.

0:57:53 Debra Schwartz: And you teach killer licks?

0:57:57 Jimmy Dillon: Killer licks would be like [plays example] — or [plays another example]

0:58:12 Debra Schwartz: And soul and passion. That's an important —

0:58:14 Jimmy Dillon: Well, soul and passion, I talk about the Four Ts a lot. Touch, tone, time and taste. Without that, you got nothing. So, the Four Ts are really important, and all of them are equally important. So time is, you know [starts strumming rhythmically] your pocket. The pocket is what makes you wanna go like that [continues playing].

0:58:32 Debra Schwartz: What they can't see is that your eyes are closed and you're feeling the music.

0:58:35 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, it's a feel thing.

0:58:37 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:58:38 Jimmy Dillon: For music has never been a thinking thing for me; it's always been a feel thing, and I think the great musicians of all time share that.

0:58:46 Debra Schwartz: When you say that, that's interesting you should say that, because you see that a lot with musicians, where they're in a place, another place, and that happens for you.

0:59:00 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, that zone or whatever you wanna call it. It always has [happened], actually, for me. It's a place we go when we're absolutely in the moment — not to wear out that phrase 'cause it's getting worn out, but — we're present in a certain way, you know. There's a surrender there. It's a surrender of your ego, it's a surrender of everything because if your ego's involved when you're playing and you're all thinking and chest out, it's all stiff and wrong, you know, it's all brittle and weird. But if you're just throwing yourself off the cliff and vulnerable as a musician, you're gonna play something that feels inspired. You can't fake the funk is the truth. You can't. Everybody smells it and knows it. And when you see posers, you know that, and they're all like, no. That's not the soulful cool people you wanna go see, you know?

0:59:51 Debra Schwartz: It's not about you, it's about —

0:59:53 Jimmy Dillon: It's not about you, it's just coming through you. You know, you're just the conduit anyway, and every good musician will tell you that.

0:59:58 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever feel, when you were younger you were the vessel waiting to be filled with that?

1:00:02 Jimmy Dillon: Absolutely. Always, always. Yeah, I mean, I went through my periods of the whole rock thing, rock star thing. But mostly, I just get possessed by the music. I inhabit a song; I live in it. There's an authenticity there that I think that you have to have, you have to access, and that's sort of the deal. Not just music, either.

1:00:28 Debra Schwartz: So, when you're describing this, and I see your inspiration, is that the place that you go that feeds everything you need to do, too?

1:00:35 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, that's the magic. That's where the magic lives.

1:00:39 Debra Schwartz: That's where you get your inspiration, your strength, your —

1:00:41 Jimmy Dillon: Everything.

1:00:42 Debra Schwartz: Everything.

1:00:42 Jimmy Dillon: It's at the center of my whole being, you know?

1:00:45 Debra Schwartz: It sort of sounds like what you were describing going in the mountain.

1:00:48 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, very much. It's the same place. I think we all share that in different ways, and I think we're all creative in different ways. I think we really are. I think how we discover that is the journey, you know? That's the process, so, yeah.

1:01:03 Debra Schwartz: So, we've talked about your time in Hollywood, or in L.A.

1:01:07 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, growing up, yup.

1:01:08 Debra Schwartz: We've talked about your time, going to Chicago, and Michigan, and Europe.

1:01:14 Jimmy Dillon: Yup, yup.

1:01:15 Debra Schwartz: And back and forth to Marin.

1:01:16 Jimmy Dillon: And Maui.

1:01:16 Debra Schwartz: And Maui, of course.

1:01:17 Jimmy Dillon: That was a big part of it.

1:01:18 Debra Schwartz: Where I've seen your brother there, up in Ulupalakua.

1:01:19 Jimmy Dillon: Yup. He's still there.

1:01:22 Debra Schwartz: And Maui.

1:01:23 Jimmy Dillon: That was cool.

1:01:24 Debra Schwartz: We once talked, a few months ago, when you were telling me about your projection into the future and plans you have with Maui still.

1:01:32 Jimmy Dillon: Well, it's interesting because I have a good friend, my friend Jeff Paisner, who I've known since, oh my gosh, donkey years. 40 years. And he and I both kind of came up on Maui in the same time, the '70s. He ended up moving back to Manhattan, and he's in regular work. He does commercial real estate for Christian Louboutin, is the business he works with.

1:01:52 Debra Schwartz: Hmm.

1:01:52 Jimmy Dillon: But that being said, he kind of got to this place where, about a year ago, he said, "You know, I'm pretty much done with this stuff and let's go back to Maui and find the dream and just get it and do it, and do a community, like a little creative community." So, we went — we flew back there and we found this magical eight acre piece and got it. And it has a little house on it, but Kelli and I, my wife and I, are gonna build a little cottage and a musical barn, a music barn on the property.

1:02:19 Debra Schwartz: And we're talking Ulupalakua?

1:02:21 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, we're talking actually, lower Kula. Oma'opio.

1:02:24 Debra Schwartz: Oh, lower Kula.

1:02:25 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, yeah. So, a little closer. I love Ulu, but it's a little far from here.

1:02:29 Debra Schwartz: It is a little — it's very nice, though.

1:02:30 Jimmy Dillon: So we're 10 minutes from the beach where we are.

1:02:31 Debra Schwartz: Which is now, apparently, the wet side of the island, by the way.

1:02:35 Jimmy Dillon: It has been lately, yeah.

1:02:36 Debra Schwartz: It used to be the dry side. [chuckles]

1:02:39 Jimmy Dillon: I know, our land is really green right now. It's weird.

1:02:41 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, yeah.

1:02:42 Jimmy Dillon: Because usually it's dry time of year, but that being said, yeah, Maui is gonna be the Maui Ramble. You know, we're gonna do the Live at Daryl's House, from Maui.

1:02:50 Debra Schwartz: Yes, and those who don't know what Live at Daryl's house is, just give a short example, because it's actually a phenomenon.

1:02:55 Jimmy Dillon: Fantastic show. Yeah. Live at Daryl's House was a show that Daryl Hall, from Hall and Oates, developed. I think originally just for an online presence. Now it's, I think, on TV. But he basically has this sort of barn-like structure in upper New York, Pawling, New York, I think. And he brings in great musicians, like Smokey Robinson, Joe Walsh, and —

1:03:13 Debra Schwartz: Oh, on and on and on it goes.

1:03:14 Jimmy Dillon: On and on and on.

1:03:15 Debra Schwartz: And [he] gets the best performances out of these —

1:03:17 Jimmy Dillon: He gets the best performances.

1:03:17 Debra Schwartz: And he has an amazing band.

1:03:19 Jimmy Dillon: He joins them.

1:03:21 Debra Schwartz: And he joins them, and it's an amazing collaboration. Some

of the best music I hear online is from watching him.

1:03:25 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, it is. And so, my job for the last 20 plus years has been Musical Supervisor, Musical Director. That's what I do. It's my job description. I get together with people, and I still get hired for this. That's what that phone call was about. Where somebody has a special event — for instance, I did a show last year in Kohanaiki, which is a place in Kona. And that was a big piece of property, and they wanted to do a fabulous show. They told me the budget. I go, "Okay." So I hire the entire Santana band, without Carlos.

1:03:55 Debra Schwartz: Oh, wow, there's a — [chuckles]

1:03:56 Jimmy Dillon: And Lisa Fischer from the Rolling Stones, and *20 Feet from Stardom*. So we created a thing called "20 Feet from Aloha," 'cause she just won an Oscar for *20 Feet from Stardom*. So, my point is, there's nothing I love better than collaborating with other musicians and creating a special night of music. And I do it in lots of different ways.

1:04:16 Debra Schwartz: And there's musicians on Maui, too.

1:04:18 Jimmy Dillon: There are, yeah, besides the obvious ones, like Michael McDonald, and Pat Simmons, and all the Nelsons.

1:04:23 Debra Schwartz: Steven Tyler's there. [laughs]

1:04:24 Jimmy Dillon: Steven Tyler, Mick Fleetwood in all his glory.

1:04:27 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:04:27 Jimmy Dillon: And the rest of them. Rick Vito, you know, from Nashville, and Fleetwood Mac, and all that. It goes on and on. Hutch Hutchinson, Bonnie Raitt's bass player, just moved to Haiku. So, there's —

1:04:35 Debra Schwartz: And who doesn't wanna come to Maui?

1:04:37 Jimmy Dillon: Our neighbor is a guy named Mike Kroeger, our neighbor, and he's in a band called Nickelback, they're from Canada.

1:04:44 Debra Schwartz: Oh, right, right, right.

1:04:46 Jimmy Dillon: But he actually lives there with his kids and everything.

1:04:48 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

1:04:48 Jimmy Dillon: It's a small world now, with the Internet and —

1:04:50 Debra Schwartz: And your brother's there.

1:04:51 Jimmy Dillon: And my brother, Bill, and our family there. I have a lot of old friends there too. So anyway, my future's gonna definitely incorporate Maui in the next couple of years as a place to be, and Mill Valley will always kind of be home, but I think we'll be spending more and more time over there and less time here, probably, as time goes by, but —

1:05:12 Debra Schwartz: But Mill Valley is your home. You are much loved by Mill Valley, and proof of that is an award.

1:05:19 Jimmy Dillon: Oh, yeah. Well, I got a call in 2012, and I was nominated for a Milley Award, which I was amazed. And then I won a Milley Award, and I was like, "Wow, this is so cool." So that's quite an honor, really. I really do feel like that's an honor. I'm in good company. Francis Cruz Smith, and all kinds of people.

1:05:37 Debra Schwartz: My friend, Betty Goerke and, soon to be our first Wednesday speaker, Bill Champlin, who's won Grammys —

1:05:42 Jimmy Dillon: Bill Champlin, yup.

1:05:43 Debra Schwartz: But he says that his most treasured award is his Milley.

1:05:48 Jimmy Dillon: Mine is, too. It really is, because to be honored by your peers and your local neighborhood, I think, is just so cool.

1:05:54 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

1:05:54 Jimmy Dillon: You know, something special. So, yeah.

1:05:56 Debra Schwartz: Feeling the love.

1:05:57 Jimmy Dillon: It's funny, we're sitting here talking about — as time goes by and you look back on your life and sometimes I'm just sort of flabbergasted at my good fortune to be in the kind of creative arts and have survived. But I'm reading a book called *Big Magic* right now. It's kind of interesting and it's about — it's important when we embrace our creative muse and all that we do creatively. Sometimes, as creators, as musicians or whatever, we put such an onus on it, financially, to produce income to us, and it can sometimes kill everything. And so, although I've been fortunate to be a musician my whole life, I think it's important to allow the music and the creativity to live in such a way that you don't put too much pressure on it.

1:06:50: So, there's the day job. We have to get creative in other ways. For me, it's teaching, which is still obviously in the music and arts realm, but I do other things. I do my little VRBO [Vacation Rentals by Owners] thing. I do what I have to do, so that I don't have to do soul damaging gigs. So the teaching has been a big plus there. It's

allowed me to pick and choose the gigs I wanna do, with who I wanna do it. But it wasn't always that way. We've all had to do two to three things we gotta do to make a living.

1:07:22 Debra Schwartz: Soul-killing gigs. In actuality, I've never heard of that.

1:07:24 Jimmy Dillon: Yes. Soul damaging, soul killing, yeah. Well, it is kind of soul killing if you're doing what you love and you're doing it in such a way that you don't like doing it. You're trying to sing over it. Like when people are eating, I have a rule, I don't sing when people are eating. I'll play. I'll play a little bit once in a while, but I'm not going to be like pouring my heart out while you're, "Pass the salt." There's just certain things you —

1:07:44 Debra Schwartz: That background chatter just doesn't work.

1:07:47 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah, but we all make compromises for our art, in lots of different ways.

1:07:52 Debra Schwartz: But you have been really fortunate that you've been — with the way you're describing it, I can see that your vision, your sort of a sense of freedom that you have to go out and do it, and you've been supported in that —

1:08:07 Jimmy Dillon: But I've also been fearless.

1:08:09 Debra Schwartz: Fearless.

1:08:09 Jimmy Dillon: Throughout. And I think you have to have a certain amount of that.

1:08:13 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. Well, managing fear is a good skill.

1:08:19 Jimmy Dillon: My mom always says, "If you wanna see God laugh, tell him your plans." You know what I mean? My mom's 98 and a half and I talk to her twice a day. She's a trip.

1:08:29 Debra Schwartz: Wow. So, we're getting close to closing this up. I'm gonna ask you just a couple of more questions.

1:08:41 Jimmy Dillon: Sure. Sure.

1:08:42 Debra Schwartz: And then I have one last request for you. You described your relationship with Mill Valley and Marin County and you've been fortunate to be able to explore your love and your passion. What would you say to kids that are living around here in a very changed world, about what it is to maneuver when you have something in you that burns and the conflicts of the daily?

1:09:18 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah. Well, to speak to what I just mentioned about honoring

our creative selves and our passion and the things we love to do, I think we have to, at the same time, attend to the more pragmatic aspects of our existence, which is making a living. So, I think the balance of those two things is where the wisdom has to come in. How do you balance your creative life with the life that you have to do to survive? It's like the Jackson Browne line, "Not trying to mix it up with the things I do to survive." And so, how do you keep that balance going? I think that's important.

1:10:00 Debra Schwartz: How do you? Yeah.

1:10:01 Jimmy Dillon: Now I think on a positive note, 'cause I tend to move that way, I'm living proof that this Internet thing, call it what you will — we're stuck with it, it's here to stay. It's been a nice opportunity for me to get not only my teaching out there but my craft as well. I've gotten songs out there; I got a gig through that. So, I think maybe with the advantage, I hope, that young kids growing up is — they're savvy with that. They're fluent in it. It's one thing being a YouTube star but you still have to, don't forget, do the work and be able to do it live. It's not enough just to do it online. And I think this whole virtual thing is kind of another subject.

1:10:44: So, I would say, whether you're a kid in Marin or anywhere, embrace the organic part of the process, the real part of it, which is the actual picking up of an instrument and playing and the joy that comes with it. And to some degree, it's not our business where it goes. Our business is to create. We're not in the business of outcomes. We're in the business of creating, and how that goes from there, there's lots of different things. There's talent, there's luck, and then there's work. Well, you only have a certain amount of talent in your DNA. Luck, that's up to the "destinos" as they say in Italy, the destinies. But the work part, you do have some choice over. You can put yourself into it, so there's no substitute for that. That's been my experience.

1:11:30 Debra Schwartz: Wise words, Jimmy.

1:11:31 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah!

1:11:32 Debra Schwartz: Now, is there anything here that we haven't talked about that you wished we had?

1:11:40 Jimmy Dillon: No, I don't think so. I can only speak from my experience. And it's been like a really, really colorful, wild trip. It's what I recommend, but it's not for the faint of heart. You have to be brave, you have to be courageous, to be an artist; and so, that's where the fearlessness comes in. You have to believe in yourself. You have to believe in what you do and how you do it. And if you do, I think that that authenticity will come through. You know? Authentic originals are what I always say, "We wanna create with Blue Star," in the past, and that's what I was trying to pass on to the kids, so, keep it real. Okay?

1:12:23 Debra Schwartz: Okay, one final request.

1:12:25 Jimmy Dillon: Yeah.

1:12:25 Debra Schwartz: Jimmy, will you grace us with a song?

1:12:28 Jimmy Dillon: Sure. [begins playing guitar]

1:12:45 Jimmy Dillon: [singing] Well, it might be a whisper or a dream in flight, street corner preacher with a guiding light, expect the unexpected, life's great mysteries, somehow undetected, though they're right in front of me. Hold on to your dreams, don't you let 'em go. Time will heal what the pain has sown. Hold on to your dreams. Now the bluest of skies has clouds and rain. Everybody feels the heartache and pain. Life is bittersweet, surely worth a ride, best that you can hope for, is a little peace inside. Hold on to your dreams, don't you let 'em go. Time will heal what the pain has sown. Hold on to your dreams.

[instrumental interlude]

1:14:37 Jimmy Dillon: [singing] Blue — might be a whisper or a dream in flight, street corner preacher with a guiding light. Expect the unexpected, life's great mysteries, somehow undetected though they're right in front of me. Yeah. Hold on to your dreams, don't you let 'em go. Time will heal what the pain has sown. Hold on to your dreams.

1:15:39 Debra Schwartz: Well, I think that just about says it all.

1:15:40 Jimmy Dillon: That about says it all.

1:15:41 Debra Schwartz: Thank you, Jimmy.

1:15:43 Jimmy Dillon: You're welcome.