

## Inside Out – Outside In – A Conversation with Guitarist Dom Minasi.

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NM

Dom, you began studying the guitar at the age of seven and by the age of fifteen had your union card. That's over a half century of being a professional musician. You've always gone against the flow, done what you believed in and fought hard for what you've loved and wanted in life especially in your music. Your career has been long and diverse. Although you are described as an Avant-Garde musician, the truth is, that is just one aspect of your artistry. In the music world where labeling and definition has practically supplanted the art form itself, how does that understanding impact what you do in terms of your ongoing innovations and performance opportunities?

DM

It seems the more adventurous I get and the more I feel like I'm growing, the less I'm able to work. In fact a well known agent a few years ago whose name I won't mention told me, "What can I tell you Dom, they're not interested in real music?" What am I supposed to do, am I supposed to stay still and not move, how can that be? I'm always going for it. Why do it if you're not going to grow? Why stay static?

NM

So as a musician you continue to grow but you find the opportunities are fewer?

DM

Yes.

NM

Do you contribute that to the state of the business itself?

DM

Yes, also the economy. It's even affecting people in Europe. The venues are not hiring some of the musicians anymore. So, the economy is bad all over.

NM

Do you think any of it is age related? I know when I was younger and knew far less, I had a million gigs. Now, it seems to be getting harder.

DM

Well that's because you're a woman. I don't know if it affects men that way so much. I haven't been age discriminated against. It's just my music. I play too far out. But, I also can play inside and played inside for years.

NM

Do you think you play too far out for the general Jazz scene and the Avant-Garde scene isn't that large?

DM

Yes

NM

Do you do anything in the Avant-Garde realm outside of NY?

DM

Sometimes if the opportunity comes along. I've played in Mexico, the Ottawa Jazz Festival and the Montreal Jazz Festival. But you know, you work there once and unless you're a superstar, the next time you're going to get back in there is going to be another four or five years. Fortunately this year, I'm doing the Vision Festival again.

NM

How did that come about?

DM

Last year they hired me to do a solo, so I did a solo. That was a lot of fun. My only problem with that gig was the air conditioning broke down and I was soaking wet. But, this year I wasn't supposed to do it but the guy I worked with in Mexico was coming in and some of his musicians couldn't make it. He called me right away and asked me if I wanted to do it, so I said, of course I want to do it. He's such a great player, his name is Remi Alvarez and he's a wonderful, wonderful player from Mexico City. I put the whole band together. He plays tenor, flute, soprano, a reeds guy. I put together Ken Filiano and Michael T.A. Thompson.

NM

Do you like to play solo and what does the preparation entail? It must be very challenging.

DM

It is very challenging so rather than just play free for an hour I like to incorporate tunes. Last year I played some free pieces and then I played some tunes. I played "Laura", "Ghost of a Chance", a really far out version of "Bye Bye Blackbird" and it was received unbelievably well.

NM

What's on the platter for this year's Vision Festival with this particular group?

DM

It's going to be just totally free form.

NM

Any preparation ahead of time or are all of you just going to meet there?

DM

No, we're going to shake hands (laugh) and play. I played with Remi last year. Even though I did the Vision Festival, when he came in to visit, I put a session together and we had such a great time. Jay Rosen was the original drummer but Jay's going to be on the road for this one so next best choice was Michael. We were lucky to get Michael.

NM

So who are some of your favorite artists that you work with frequently?

DM

Ken Filiano, Tomas Ulrich, Jay Rosen, Joe Giardullo, Joe McPhee, Albey Balgochian, Daniel Carter, Ras Moshe, Sabir Mateen, Matt Lavelle and Blaise Siwula. Blaise and I have been together for sixteen years as a duo, I have a great time playing with him.

NM

Those guys are like the Who's Who of the creative scene. What is it about them that you like so much?

DM

It's something that they do that is very soulful and has this high energy, because I'm into high energy. It's very, very soulful and creative and challenging at the same time. It's challenging to not play the same things all the time. Because that's one of the things you hear all the time. You go to hear a group and they play for an hour and there's nothing really going on, so the point is to be creative. The whole point is to listen and to inspire each other. That's how my record came about, *The Bird, The Girl and The Donkey*.

NM

Yes, let's talk about that one now that you brought it up. (*The Bird, The Girl and The Donkey*, 2010 Rekonstrukt Records).

DM

Well you know how that happened was just a freak thing. I just needed to play more so I started organizing sessions at my apartment and the first session I organized was this. Albey came over, Ras, Blaise, Jay and me. I turned on the tape recorder and we just played and we played long, long, long pieces. When I listened back to it, I couldn't believe how good it sounded. I must have had the tape recorder in the exact spot because it got everything clearly and I did a remix, cutting some of the pieces making them shorter and then I started to think about titles and came up with the story about the girl.

NM

The title really conjures the curiosity – what is this about?

DM

It's like my song writing, it comes from nowhere ... it's just like BOOM! I didn't want to write normal liner notes so I wrote this story about a little girl walking down a road all by herself carrying this big bundle. She sits down to take a rest and while she's resting a bird comes along. So the bird asks, "What are you doing sitting by yourself along the road and what is this big bundle?" She says, "I have to bring this bundle someplace and it's very heavy." So the bird says, "You need help, I'll be right back." Ten minutes later the bird comes back and is riding on top of a donkey's head. The girl and the package get on top of the donkey and he rides her to her destination. The girl thanks them and the bird asks, "I'm curious, what is in that bundle?" She says, "These are all the notes that they need to play for Dom Minasi's record session." The moral of the story is: If you're going to play a lot of notes, you may as well have the best players!

NM

So basically the music told the story and you wrote it.

DM

Yes. That's what happened with *The Vampire's Revenge* it's based on a story I wrote.

NM

So there's so much more to this than somebody just sitting down and saying, "Let me think of a hip little name for my album." The story and music come out of one another.

DM

Well my other records like: *Takin' the Duke Out*, which is all Duke Ellington tunes and *Goin' Out Again* and *Quick Response* are based on tunes with a lot of fast tempos. But after *Vampire's Revenge* I really got into the story writing.

NM

What's the story behind *Vampire's Revenge* and isn't your wife Carol Mennie singing on this one? She sounds great by the way. I've not heard her in this genre before, mostly straight ahead singing and cabaret but she sounded very cool.

DM

Yes, I know she has incredible ears. Well the story goes like this. There's this gorgeous woman vampire who goes to CBGB's one night and the band hadn't set up yet. So she goes next door to the Galleria and she hears all this weird music coming from downstairs. And, the reason why she goes to CBGB's is because that is where a lot of the young meat is, and she likes that. So she goes downstairs looks at the doorman hypnotizes him and gets in free. She goes to the bar and she's listening to this music and as she's listening, one of the musicians who is waiting to play starts to talk to her and they hit it off. So he asks her to wait for him and she agrees because she has something in mind. So he goes and plays and afterward she takes him home. So while they're making love, she bites him on the neck. At first he struggles but she keeps biting and sucking and he goes into a trance. Before you know it he becomes a vampire too. So she takes him out and teaches him how to be a vampire and there are some positive things to it like he can only go out and play at night, which is OK, you know? Then he thinks, "I'm a vampire, maybe instead of killing people I can get them interested in my music! I'm going to turn all the people on to Avant-Garde music." So he does that but nothing happens, there's still nobody in the audiences. He gets so upset that he goes on a killing spree. All of a sudden NYPD realizes that there is a vampire on the loose and they get a vampire hunter. They celebrate with a big parade and he goes out looking for the vampire. You don't see this guy for two days and then he's found dead in a ditch with his throat ripped out. So later on that evening, David Letterman is talking about the vampire story on his show when he gets a phone call during his monologue from the vampire who says: "I will get my revenge!" And that's how I arrived at the title.

NM

That's cool, sounds kind of autobiographical. I'm going to leave it on that one. Hopefully you will get your revenge (laughter).

DM

Well, I got into reading all the Anne Rice books, that's what happened. And I love them.

NM

You are highly regarded by your peers as an Avant-Garde musician, but how would you describe yourself in a word?

DM

I'm just a musician and composer. I don't consider myself Avant-Garde – I don't like that label. I'm just an improviser, I guess.

NM

But many genres of music incorporate improvisation not just Jazz.

DM

I play Straight-Ahead Jazz, Bebop; I grew up on that music.

NM

Is mostly everything you play though within the Jazz realm?

DM

I can play the Blues. I've done Blues gigs, Rock-n-Roll gigs, Disco gigs. I've done it all. I also played with the Long Island Symphony and Dave Brubeck reading parts.

NM

Why is it then that you have this label?

DM

Because, for the past fourteen years I've been playing some really far out music.

NM

When did you make the transition?

DM

I always was there from the time I was a kid. It's just that I did what I had to do in order to work. A lot of people knew I was into that.

NM

How did you discover the "out" musicians or the Avant-Garde scene?

DM

I didn't know anything about the scene. I always wanted to get into it and then when the CBGB thing happened that's where I started to meet musicians, after *Takin' the Duke Out*. I only knew a few musicians, Michael Jeffrey Steven, Jay Rosen, and Dom Duval. That's how I got into it. One of the things about the "Avant-Garde business" and you know this, there are a lot of fakes out there that can't play. And, that's the one thing about it that bothers me a lot.

NM

Do you believe that you have to be able to play “in” before you can take it “out” and if you were to advise a younger musician who wanted to go in that direction what would you tell him that he must do to prepare for a career as an Avant-Garde player?

DM

There are guys out there who play “out” who don’t understand harmony and theory and they can play, but most of them can’t play. They don’t have the talent. You can put chord changes in front of them on the bandstand and they can’t do it. But I believe you should know that. My whole approach to playing “out” is through harmony and theory, substitutions and changing things. I weave in and out of the harmony in order to make it work for me. The chord changes are in my head. I would advise a young player, if you want to play “out”, learn to play “in” first, do your homework. Learn to play Bebop, and the Blues. Learn to play Modern music, Modal music and Third Stream music...because what happens when you’re a free form improviser, all of that comes into play. And, all your life experiences come into it as well. When I was fourteen years old, I was backing up all the rock-n-roll shows. Somewhere in me it sometimes comes out. In the late’70’s when things were bad for me, Disco was in and I had to play that too. It’s all part of it of my musical education and life experience.

NM

You also teach. You have some books that you’ve written, how long have you been teaching and do you teach in a traditional fashion?

DM

I’ve been teaching since I was nineteen years old – forty-eight years. When I started to teach there weren’t any books on Jazz harmony and theory for guitar. So I wrote my first book when I was twenty-two because I’m self taught. But, I didn’t publish it until I was thirty-three. Then, I did another one and another one...and last year I put out one that you’re aware of. I sell them through Freehand Music, which is a digital download company. I have a bunch of tunes on there and an anthology. They have about eighty of my tunes.

NM

Do you do any teaching in the schools?

DM

I used to. I was the first one to do Literacy Through Songwriting something I developed for the Board of Education. I taught kids how to read through writing songs. It was a great program, I worked constantly and then 9/11 came along and they ran out of money. A couple years ago I finally got back into it but they ran out of money again and the organizations I used to work for were constantly changing people. I didn’t know them and they didn’t know me so that was it.

NM

What are some of the main components to “Avant-Garde” music and how would you enlighten a lay-person who regards it as noise?

DM

To the ones who really know how to play it, it is not just noise. There is always something going on. You can focus on listening to one person even if three or four musicians are playing at the same time. Somebody in there is taking the lead. It’s a very visual music and it’s all about listening. When I play behind horn players or singers, I can be playing a million notes but I’m still not playing the lead. It’s like a wall of sound that they can just build on and it goes by at a million miles an hour, but I am not the lead player. The singer or the horn player is however, and they play on top of that. So instead of me playing chords I play so many notes that they come out like chords.

NM

As I a singer, I don’t always feel like I have to be the lead. In a situation like you describe, I can also take a position within the composition itself.

DM

Right, basically, it’s all instant composition, scoring and arranging. And, that takes a lot of training and you have to have great ears.

NM

Also the choices in sounds because it’s about sound, it’s not about noise even though noise is also a kind of sound and can be incorporated for effect.

DM

Yes, noise can be incorporated, but noise is noise, it’s not music, that’s the difference. There are guys out there that make a lot of noise, but they’re not making music. I believe in notes.

NM

That’s the vehicle right there, notes. Few people know what a wonderful Standards composer and lyricist you are. This past March you and I performed a concert of some of your compositions at the Metropolitan Room with Jay Rosen on drums and Ken Filiano on bass. It was a joy to sing your music and I was particularly impressed with your lyric writing. Now I know you are a storyteller. You have many sides. How long have you been writing lyrics and what inspired the beautiful music we did that evening?

DM

I started writing lyrics when I was around fourteen years old. They were the worst songs you could imagine. They all had that I, VI, II, V, I thing but when I got into my twenties I started to write better lyrics and by the time I was in my thirties I was writing really good lyrics and by the time I hit forty, I think I hit the mark. And, then being married to Carol, every time I’d write a tune she’d say, “You can do

better than that.” And, so she is like my muse. Also, when I was a kid my mother took me to all these musicals, which I hated because they’d sing about anything but some great music came out of all of that but I didn’t really appreciate it until I got older.

NM

It’s not easy to write lyrics, it’s a very special craft.

DM

Yes, it’s a very special craft. There are songs out there that I wish I had written they’re so good. If I’m writing for a particular genre and time period, I have to keep it there. It’s all about finding the right words. It took me twenty years to write the lyrics to “Brown Eyes” and “For My Father”, I could never get it right

NM

How do you know when it’s right?

DM

Well with “Brown Eyes”, I kept trying and trying and then gave up. Then twenty years later, I woke up and the lyrics were just there, they just flowed right out and the same thing happened with “For My Father”.

NM

I see that your wife Carol has been the main inspiration behind much of your music.

DM

Most of the songs from the show you and I did were inspired by Carol but, not all. I wanted to write a Modal piece so I wrote, “Blue Skies”, and “Lousy Weather” came out of my wanting to write a Blues. But, the Jazz Standard has always been the inspiration behind my compositions and the model for my writing since I was a kid, that’s what I listened to the most especially the lyrics. I think it’s really important for a musician to learn the lyrics along with the song and most importantly with ballads. It’s important to know what the song is about – the story.

NM

As an independent artist you wear many hats, please speak on what you’re doing to survive in today’s highly competitive, technological and fast paced world.

DM

I’m president of my own record company, CDM Records. I’m a producer, arranger, composer, and booking agent. It’s very hard to do everything yourself. I find it difficult to talk about myself. Some of the

festivals and concerts I do get from agents but the smaller gigs around town, I get on my own. Some of the gigs around don't pay. I have to tell you when I was a kid working in clubs, I made \$50 a gig. And it stayed that way for years and years. Now, you make nothing. You work for the hat or the door. It's gotten worse.

The colleges have budgets and what they do is they hire a name. And the name will demand all this money and it will wipe out their budget. The major players demand so much money that there is not enough for the other musicians. I don't know what it's like in Europe but I don't think that they are bringing in as much money here because people don't have the money to spend. To go to the Blue Note for the admission and a couple drinks it costs you \$150 or more. They have made it impossible even for the Jazz musicians to go and hang out. Twenty years ago, as a Jazz musician, you could go to the Blue Note and just hang out at the bar, and there wouldn't be any cover. Bradley's the same thing. Now, there's no such thing, you pay just like everybody else. The only way I get to see major names is if I call them since they're friends and they get me in. Who can afford these kinds of prices?

NM

So, more and better paying gigs, representation, and consideration from the clubs are at the top of the list of things that need improvement. Do you think we as musicians can change this sad reality?

DM

No. New York is one of the most expensive places in the world. It has tons of music all around but the musicians aren't making any money. And the younger musicians come out of school and they want to play and they come here and work for nothing. That's it.

NM

What do you think of some of the younger players?

DM

Well there are few really great players, but they're not just out of school, they are in their thirties and forties and some are in their twenties. But I blame the schools a lot for all of this. I mean, the schools were created so Jazz musicians could have a gig, let's face it, to teach. There are Jazz programs all over the United State teaching the same stuff and the kids are all coming out of the schools playing the same way and then where are they going to go? ... New York. So we have this influx of thousands of musicians coming to New York all the time.

NM

But they're not teaching them how to make a living as a Jazz musician.

DM

That's right. I had a conversation with T.S. Monk a few years ago and asked him what they're doing by putting out all these musicians and sending them here. They all think they're great and that they're going to make it. Then they find out there's a hundred here better than they are.

NM

Do you think it has come down to cronyism that gets the gigs and the opportunities? Is it truly who you know over what you know that brings the breaks to the musician beyond anything else?

DM

Yes, definitely.

NM

There are most certainly musicians who can really play, but there seems to be many more that can be replaced by any Tom, Dick or Harry.

DM

True, because they are mediocre players and some are not even any good at all.

NM

I've observed many musicians patterning themselves physically and in other ways after the greats, like Bud Powell for instance. They don the suits and acquire the whole vibe; young cats dressing like old guys, a complete reenactment so to speak. They've got the whole demeanor which is kind of funny but that doesn't make the music does it?

DM

No it doesn't, but they've been doing it since the fifties, with Charlie Parker, Trane. It's life that makes the music. That's the difference with kids coming out of school and just playing. It's the people who have lived the music who are making the music. To be a great player you have to live it.

NM

How then do we explain guys like Tony Williams who as a teenager was playing with Sam Rivers and then Miles Davis?

DM

We still have that, there's always somebody who comes out. There was a kid who was playing with Wallace Roney at the Apollo, opposite us. I forget his name but he was from Cuba I think and he was about 16 years old and wow, he was amazing, unbelievable. There's always going to be somebody. When I was that age, people were flipping over the way I played. But there's so many getting into the music now and with the technology, they can record in their house and put out a record.

NM

What younger musicians do you think are pretty strong today?

DM

Jonathan Kreisberg is a great guitar player and also Lage Lund and Julian Lage both of whom are in their late twenties, maybe early thirties. But then there are the guys who are a generation after me such as Vic Juris and then after him is Rodney Jones, who is one of the greats. With some of the others out there, I think what happens when they record they don't really play the way they can play because they are afraid they are not going to sell any records or get any gigs. So some of what's being played I like then there's stuff I don't and it's from the same artist. From the time I started playing on my own record label I said, I'm going to play the way I want come hell or high water. A lot of guys have said to me, "I wish I could do that."

NM

What New York clubs can you list that consistently have good music?

DM

Well, Smalls is one, but I've never played there. I've never been to the Zinc Bar because I'm not into "guitar nights". Every Monday night is guitar night and there's going to be 200 hundred guitar players who show up. So no, there's not a lot of clubs to go to and even less for the Avant-Garde.

NM

Please elaborate on some of the new music you are currently writing, specifically the classical.

DM

The classical music is something I always wanted to do. Since the normal classical quartet is two violins, viola and cello, I changed it to violin, cello, bass and guitar. The guitar takes the place of the viola and then also can take the place of second violin and the bass can take the place of the cello while the cello takes the place of...you know, it's an intricate kind of thing. When I went back to school at the age of forty-eight, I studied classical music. I got into listening to a lot of classical music even though I was writing it earlier on. I got into a group called "MICE (Manhattan Improvisational Chamber Ensemble). Dominic Duval was in it also John Gunther, an opera singer, Jay Rosen, guitar, saxophone and violin. I wrote experimental music for that group and I really enjoyed it. We worked a bit. And then, when I had a chance, I started writing these quartet things for a group I put together that came out of *The Vampire's Revenge*. I took the music from Vampire and rearranged it for the string quartet and because we were working a lot at the 5C Café, I started to write all new music. It was all charted in such a way that you couldn't tell the difference between the written music and the improvised music, that's what I wanted. And the music wouldn't work unless we really listened to one another. We put a record out that got great reviews called *Dissonance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder*. The group is now two years old

and we've done a gig at the Stone and one major concert. I've been recommended for a grant so if I get it, I'm going to do another record. It's all about money. If I don't have the money I can't do it. I produce myself, that's why I've been recording for other record companies

NM

We live in a digital world with free downloads, and younger musicians are giving their music away and not buying into the corporate mentality. How much do you think reviews actually help sell CD's today and what in your opinion is the best way for an artist to get his/her music heard by a larger audience?

DM

Reviews always help, if anything, they get your name out there. They may not sell CDs though. A few people may buy the CD but then give them to their friends to copy. But I've gotten lots of radio play from colleges. But the colleges aren't equipped to deal with digital downloads so they and the online radio stations want the hard copy. I have a radio person who takes care of all that. Some reviewers will accept a digital download but not most so it's just another unnecessary expense for the artist.

NM

How do you feel about advertising and do you put aside a budget for that purpose?

DM

I did that for nine years. But the truth is *Vampire's Revenge* wiped me out. I don't ask my musicians to rehearse for free or record for free. Everybody gets paid. The expense on my end is enormous. Every recording I made except for *Dissonance* and *The Bird the Girl and the Donkey*, I paid everything, the rehearsals, recording and the musicians got paid well, all from my company.

NM

What do you think about clubs that expect you to do all the promotion, help them keep their doors open and don't have a music budget to pay the musicians?

DM

I try not to play those clubs, except for a select few places that are trying to get started and are worthy. But things are pretty bad.

NM

Do you know of any other Avant-Garde festivals other than the Vision Festival?

Yes, there are other festivals but the thing is I find out about them AFTER they send me an email announcement that it's happening and then I get in touch with them and it's too late. I don't know how to find out about these festivals that is why I need an agent. And the agents... well it's like everything

else, they are looking for established artists, the managers too. They want you to do all the work and then they'll help you but then what do you need them for if you're already working?

NM

Yes, I've experienced that too, it's a catch 22 everywhere you go, like trying to find your way through a labyrinth.

DM

Yes, especially for the kind of music I'm playing. If I was a just a Straight-Ahead player, maybe I'd work more but I really don't know.

NM

Yes, I understand, I do both Straight-Ahead and Avant-Garde music and the only thing that is different is the kind of people who come out to hear you play, or don't come out to hear you.

DM

Fortunately, the first time I did CBGB's Downstairs Avant Series after playing gigs where only two people would show up, my wife and Blaise's wife, the place was packed and people were cheering. I couldn't believe it; it was like this great experience.

NM

I didn't have that experience until I went to Europe. When I left the United States I really felt like a musician. I got paid well for starters and of course the acknowledgment felt great.

DM

When I was in Mexico, I played for thousands of people. When I came back at the first gig, which was Local 269, three people showed up. You get standing ovations everywhere but here. Ottawa was the same thing. Come back to New York and nothing.

NM

That's pretty disconcerting. New York is where it's supposed to be happening.

DM

When we did Montreal, the place was sold out. They didn't even want to tell me, it was a surprise. I got a standing ovation for the group, same thing in Ottawa, and I'm playing far out music. It's a big difference the way people in other countries listen to your music.

NM

Why do you think that is?

DM

They have a broader arts education. Let's face it, Europeans were raised on everybody from Bach to Schoenberg, they understand Straight-Ahead, they understand Avant-Garde, they understand the art and they appreciate it. Where here, the kids don't even know who Duke Ellington is, it's sad.

NM

You recently recorded with Anthony Braxton, please talk about that experience.

DM

I can tell you how it happened first. The recording engineer who has done most of my recordings, Jon Rosenberg, is Anthony's recording engineer. Anthony takes him all over the world. That's why he has so many recordings. He documents everything. And one day John came to me and said, "I'd love to see you play with Anthony." I told him I'd love to play with Anthony and he got in touch with him. Anthony asked me to send him some of my CDs, which I did and he really liked it. Then he was appearing at the Iridium so I went to see him and introduced myself and he hugged me and said, "Dom, I love the way you play, we've got to record together." So a couple of years went by and we still hadn't recorded. Then last year he was doing a couple days of his music here and I went to see him again and he said, "Let's do it." So we set it up for January and that didn't work out then we set it up for March at Wesleyan College Center. It was just the two of us and Jon. From the very first note, it was like we had been playing together for twenty years. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. He was so musical. We just listened to each other. He has this hourglass that he turned over. We played for an hour straight without stopping. When he stopped to change instruments, I never stopped. It was really hot and exhilarating at the same time.

NM

What kind of person is Anthony Braxton?

DM

He was such a good guy. He was joyful, he was happy. We went out to dinner we laughed and had a good time together. We knew about the same kinds of movies and TV shows. I just had such a great time. So we did the first hour, rested for about 45 minutes, then we did the second hour. The next day we did the same thing.

NM

Wow, were you depleted?

DM

By the time the last note came out, I was totally wiped out. My biggest concern was that I didn't want to sound the same on everything. Because when you play an hour straight, you don't want to repeat yourself and it didn't happen, for him or for me. It was one of the best experiences of my whole life.

NM

Tell me about the first time you heard John Coltrane.

DM

Well it was at Birdland when I was a kid. Back in those days, Birdland had a peanut gallery for kids in the back. He was playing with Miles. They were doing, "I'll Remember April", but he was playing so far out and so fast, I just couldn't comprehend it. I was fifteen years old and I was just learning how to play the Blues and starting to improvise a little bit so this was like too much for me to handle. But five years later that's what I was listening to.

NM

And to your point earlier, that you have to play "in" before you can play "out", Anthony Braxton can play "in" quite nicely.

DM

Oh, yes, he can, he knows a lot of tunes. We talked about a lot of musicians that people may not know about. Musicians both he and I played with. Our backgrounds are almost similar. We talked about race. We talked about everything. We became instant friends.

NM

Is this going to be an upcoming release?

DM

I don't know. Anthony is the one who decides those kinds of things but I know he's going to release it "as it", an hour disc, if he does, not cut in sections.

NM

That's great. I know that the record labels, even if they're independently owned, want you to play within a certain prescribed amount of time.

DM

It was always that way, from the time I was a kid. I was recording Rock-n-Roll records when I was sixteen years old and they always had to be two and a half, three minutes long. But that's not the case now. In 2007, I participated in the Guitar Legends Workshops at the Jazz Improv LIVE! Convention & Festival, and Mark Elf (Jenbay Jazz) said, "When you do a record, always have a famous person on it." I don't believe in that. I want to have guys I'm comfortable with. That's formulaic thinking. Gary Walker then

said that songs on a CD shouldn't be any longer than three and a half, four minutes long. But meanwhile in the morning, I turn on the radio and I hear him playing stuff that's eight, nine minutes long, who's he kidding? It's just a crock.

NM

Yes, I believe the thinking is that a CD should be under 78 minutes long because according to the "experts"..."people's attention spans are limited. Also, I think it is the cost of putting out a double CD – it's always about the money it seems.

DM

What I did with Vampire's Revenge because I knew it was going to be long, my premise was that I was bringing in the best of the Downtown people to play and I wasn't going to limit them. I told everyone of the different groups that we weren't watching a time clock. They were there to play. I knew once we got past sixty minutes, it was going to be a double CD. I wanted them to play and I wanted to play with them too. It's always been about the music. Music first! It's never been about me, it's only been about the music and I believe in that. It's not about a group backing me up. Even on my bigger groups. The reviewers have said that my name may be out front but it's always about the group and that I let everybody play. That's right.

NM

What do you suggest can be done to create more interest in Jazz music and build audiences for the future of the music and its members?

DM

First of all, it's all about education. And I don't mean the music schools. Children have to be introduced to the music at an early age. They have to be aware of it. When I went to high school they always had general music programs. In general music you learned about Classical music and Jazz. I happened to be fortunate that all the music teachers that I had were into Jazz, but kids have to be introduced to the music. If they are introduced to it at a young age they can learn to appreciate it. Instead of listening only to Hip hop, Rap or whatever it is, we have the responsibility to broaden their education. And, I know there are a lot of arts programs in the schools, but they always cut them first. It is a proven fact that kids who are into music and art do better. We have to constantly keep pushing it. When I was teaching in the schools, one of the things I would get to was scat singing. And I would scat sing for the kids, they were about six years old, and they would laugh. But then I would ask them to try it. So, this one little girl came up and does it. So I asked her how she learned to do that. Her parents played Jazz all the time in the house and they loved Jazz. So I asked again for someone else to try. This time a little boy came up and he does it. He learned it from the *Bill Cosby Show*. If we saw more Jazz on TV instead of the *American Idol* stuff that promotes singing garbage and out of tune, it would be better you know? When I was a kid, Dr. Billy Taylor had a Jazz show every Saturday and you couldn't get me away from the TV set. I was eight years old. Mel Torme had a show too and he used to play drums. We don't have that anymore. *Take Dancing with the Stars* for instance. What they call a rumba is not a rumba, what they call a Samba is not a Samba, a Cha Cha is not a Cha Cha, it's all Rock-n-Roll. I wrote to them twice. They're conning people. I've played this music. What they're playing is all homogenized and watered down.

NM

As an educator you teach privately, lecture, and conduct workshops and clinics. What is one important thing you stress above all other things that you give your students to take with them on their personal musical journey and especially given the state of the art in 2011?

DM

You have to be true to yourself and your art. Try and be the best you can and learn as much as you can without being attached to the outcome. If your focus is only on “making it” then you’re not going to enjoy the process.

NM

We all have our good days and our bad days, how does Dom Minasi deal with the bad days and how important is faith in your life?

DM

Music is my saving grace and I love what I do very much but I also have a wife that I love so very much, she is my rock. We have our bad days when we argue with each other, but we get over it. We have a thirty minute rule, whatever happens, thirty minutes later we makeup. I have an ego but I try not to let it get in my way. Once you let the ego get out of control, it’s all about you and life isn’t always about you it’s about everything. Get out of your own way. My faith is not a faith in God. It’s a faith in myself and the Universe doing the right thing no matter how painful it sometimes can be. I’m very spiritual and I believe that I was put on this earth for a reason and so when I get a little down, I play my guitar or I write something. I stay busy and I stay involved in life but I also know that during the really bad days, I am loved. I am loved by my wife, my two children, my grandchildren, my friends, my cats (Cole and Trane) and I feel needed. We’re here on this earth to learn and to grow. And, most importantly we have to give back. Giving back is the biggest part of it. That’s why I love working with kids. But, I was always a fighter. I fought for what I wanted to do and I’m still fighting for what I want to do.