



Interview No. SAS7.31.02
Justin Thomas

Interviewer: Elizabeth Schaaf
Location: Baltimore, Maryland
Date: July 31, 2002

Q: Tell me your full name and when and where you were born.

Thomas: My name is Justin Brian Thomas. I was born here in Baltimore, and I was born in 1987, June 22nd.

Q: When did music start becoming a part of your life?

Thomas: Music started becoming my life when I was seven years old, when I was introduced to the steel pan, and they had a steel band and they set a steel pan in front of me to see if I knew anything. It was a copy game. I had to copy what they did to see if I could be in the band. That's how I started my music, and I became a member of the band.

Then, later on in elementary school when I was eight years old, an instructor named Mr. Wendell Hairston, introduced me to the xylophone, and this instrument was easy to learn. So I just fell in love with it and practiced and that's how I started jazz.

Q: So you've been studying now for?

Thomas: For eight years.

Q: And how long were you with Mr. Hairston?

Thomas: I was only with him in elementary school, from grade 3 to 5.

Q: And who else have you studied with?

Thomas: Well, I studied with teachers from my middle school.

Q: Now where were you in middle school?

Thomas: Oh, I went to Loch Raven Academy middle school. And I studied with Miss Boyle, Mr. St. Pierre, and Mr. Eric Sloan. And now that I attend School for the Arts I am studying with Mr. John Locke, who is a percussionist in the BSO. Then I studied with Jeff Antoniak who's a

saxophone player, and he plays jazz so I study techniques, different kind of improvisations to improve myself.

Q: Well, you've already been doing a lot of performing, haven't you?

Thomas: Yes, I have.

Q: Where was the first public performance that you did?

Thomas: I think the first public performance was when I was in the steel band, and I believe we were performing at some museum. I'm not sure what it was. The B & O [Railroad Museum] or the BMA [Baltimore Museum of Art]. I don't remember the museum. I forgot the name, but that's my first performance that I remember. Because it was during break, and a gentleman asked me to play "Mary Had a Little Lamb" on the steel pan, and I played it, and I got like five dollars for it. [Laughter]

Q: That's great. What was the elementary school that you went to?

Thomas: I went to Yorkwood Elementary School.

Q: Well, are either of your parents musicians?

Thomas: My father is a musician. His name is Winthrop Thomas, and I don't know how long he's been playing because he lives in New York. But right now, I think he's not playing as much as he used to. Only my father's a musician.

Q: What kind of music does he play?

Thomas: He plays all kinds, but I think he mostly plays calypso. More Caribbean music.

Q: And what kind of music did you listen to at home growing up?

Thomas: Jazz. A lot of jazz. That brought me where I wanted to be — jazz.

Q: So of all the solo performances that you've done, which one was the most satisfying for you and the most exciting?

Thomas: The most exciting one I think I did was when I went to Showtime at the Apollo.

Q: When was this?

Thomas: This was three years ago. And that's when I was going to Loch Raven Academy. We traveled up to New York to go to the Apollo. I had to send a tape to get on the show. So, I played the vibraphone and I played a jazz piece by Duke Ellington, and it is called "Take the A Train", and I think that was the most exciting one, because just to stand in front of an audience on a famous TV show was just a very good experience and meeting Steve Harvey was nice also.

Q: Wow. That's nice. What a rush.

Thomas: Yeah. [Laughter]

Q: So how long do you think it will take you to get back to the Apollo?

Thomas: Well, I'm not sure if I'm going back to the Apollo 'cause I thought about it very little. I thought about going back to the Apollo, doing a multi-performance, playing the steel pan, then switch to the keyboard and going back to the steel pan. But I'm not sure if I'm going back.

Q: This was your first year in School for the Arts?

Thomas: Yes, School for the Arts. This is going to be my second.

Q: So you're going into your second year.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: How has it been different studying over there?

Thomas: Oh, from past experiences? The School for the Arts is way different because you have double the work that you had to do back then. And then you study more classical. You get inside of it, who made it, the literature of it. And you learn music theory. It's not complicated — but it's just more. It's not expected so it's just more to do. But I think it's also interesting to find out the inside about composers and everything. So, it's a very nice experience.

Q: The classical technique must be really useful to have at your fingertips when you're working with jazz?

Thomas: Yeah, I find that very useful. Especially musical because it's that I interpret the information and then I exert it through the jazz and other styles, to make it — not make it unusual — to make it different, but also make it sound good. Basically to have my own style.

Q: So where do you see yourself in ten years? Well, let's back up. Where do you see yourself headed after School for the Arts?

Thomas: I want to head to a college, but I'm not sure which one. My choices are Berklee in Boston, the College of Music, and the University of Miami because I heard that was a good school also. And I want to go there for producing, because I want to become a producer, and also I want to be a performer. So I want to produce music, make the music, and make CDs and also be a performer. and also be a performer.

Q: So that pretty much takes us where you want to go when you get out of here. You've done a lot of playing around town. Who were some of the folks that you enjoy playing with?

Thomas: There's this band — the Bobby Ward Trio — that I played with a few Sundays. Most of the shows were a fund raiser for me to get instruments or whatever. This show was planned by Jim Staton, Miss Donna Holley and Miss Eleanor Janey, and they introduced me to this band, I believe. I think they're really good. We didn't practice together, but if we chose a song and we perform it, it's like we knew we was doing it. So it's very communicating. So if we didn't practice and we performed, we knew what we were doing.

Q: That's wonderful. It's great fun when you fall into a situation like that.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: So are you going to stay in touch with these folks?

Thomas: Yeah. I am. I will stay in touch 'cause later on in the year I hope we can make a CD together.

Q: Good. Now who are the musicians in the band?

Thomas: The musicians — well the drummer, his name is Bobby Ward. And sometimes the keyboardist and saxophonist change so I'm not keeping track with their names. But there's also a guitarist. I'm not sure what his name is, but I heard that he has his own club and he performs also. So I'm hoping to stay in touch with them so we can get something going out there.

Q: Where have you been playing here?

Thomas: Places like around here? I played at the Walters Art Gallery. I played like at Martin's West — I can't really think of it because it's a lot of places that I've played.

Q: I know. [Laughter]

Thomas: Yeah. I played hotels, parties and etc. I remember playing at a post office when they was releasing the Malcolm X stamp. I played there. It was a whole bunch of places.

Q: Right. And I know you played over at Coppin [State College].

Thomas: Yeah, I played at Coppin.

Q: And you were at the Eubie Blake Center too.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: So how busy is your schedule? How much time do you put in practicing?

Thomas: Practice two hours at least. I'm really focused now, because, I'm growing up, and I have to do something more with my music. So I would say two hours, at least. If I'm into it, then it's just probably four hours.

Q: Goes fast, doesn't it?

Thomas: Yeah. It does. [Laughter] Like you make one song, and you feel like it's ten minutes, but it is two hours that passed. So music is fun. So I would say two hours.

Q: So when you're not playing music, what are you doing?

Thomas: That's a good question. Most of the time I'm talking on the phone. Now, lately, I haven't been watching TV as I used to. So, I'm either playing games, or I'm writing music. I like to compose.

Q: So how long have you been writing?

Thomas: Well, it's on and off I've been writing so I believe two years. I started to write, and I set it aside and then this year I came back to writing because I want to get my songs copyrighted.

Q: And have your own music.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: A lot of theory and a lot of music theory. But that's fun.

Thomas: Yeah. It is.

Q: So who are you studying music theory with?

Thomas: Well, the teacher that I was studying with the past year, his name is Mr. Allen Good, and he's a pianist I believe. We study things from all the way back — plainchant where it didn't have rhythm and choruses, etc. And then we went to counterpoint and things like that.

Q: More tools.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: More tools to play with. Are you writing mostly jazz or have you done some classical pieces too?

Thomas: I'm not going to write any classical. But I'm going to include some classical with my jazz, but lately I've been writing all kinds — like slow, fast, R&B, hip hop, rap, jazz, Caribbean, you know, those things.

Q: It's really good to have such catholic tastes in music, taking little bits and pieces from everything and seeing how it goes together.

Thomas: Yeah. Because it gives it a different feel to it, better than just playing a jazz piece with only jazz techniques, while you can use classical techniques or different, a different kind of technique from the song that you were playing. It's very interesting.

Q: A lot of what you are talking about sounds like Ellis Larkins.

Thomas: Oh yeah. He is a keyboardist. I remember playing with him one time when I was playing at Coppin State. It was the intergenerational jazz quartet.

Q: Yeah. I was at that concert. It was great. [Laughter]

Thomas: Thank you.

Q: Yeah. He was a wonderful, isn't he wonderful to play with?

Thomas: He really is. 'Cause I like him. I like his improvising and everything.

Q: What was it like getting together with him and practicing?

Thomas: Well, I didn't really practice much with him. I really practiced a lot with the guitarist whose name is Christopher Brooks. He's the son of Miss Camay Murphy, and she is the daughter of Cab Calloway. So I'd been working with him a lot, practicing with him, and then all we did was just make sure what song I knew that the pianist knew because we need the pianist and the bass.

Q: I see. And you just went out there and let it happen.

Thomas: Yeah. It was really fun. Cause the ego just takes you — it was just the ego.

Q: Just go with it.

Thomas: Yeah. Sometimes it's hard to stop. You got to stop.

Q: Now, I've been out there for several of those concerts, and one of them Gary Thomas played.

Thomas: Gary Thomas.

Q: Gary Thomas. He's head of the jazz program here.

Thomas: I don't recall. I'm not sure.

Q: That was the year after the one you're talking about I think. But I was just wondering whether you had had any opportunity to see Gary perform.

Thomas: I don't think so. Because I didn't play all the time at Coppin State. At a certain time I think I stopped and then I was going to get back into it.

Q: I hear people talking about doing music, and your name comes up all the time. We need to get Justin, we need to get Justin. Is it getting hard to keep space for your studying and your writing and practicing and balancing the performance obligations?

Thomas: To me? I don't think it's hard. I think it's just something fun to me. So if I'm doing something like let's say we're going to rehearse in five minutes like, I will probably use those five minutes very wisely. Like I wouldn't go talk to my friends or whatever, I would probably think of a rhythm and then like when I can't get it, I probably go talk to my friends. So I just try to fit everything. Even though I'm busy, I try to fit everything. I'm performing, I'm also using technique that I use to also help me practice so I can fit it in.

Q: Well, that's great. Learning how to balance your time.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: This will come in very handy for you.

Thomas: It's like killing two birds with one stone.

Q: Absolutely. So do your friends complain to you that they don't have, you know, that you don't have enough time for them?

Thomas: Not really. They haven't complained.

Q: I know there's always a struggle with musicians and being involved in sports because you don't want to do anything that's likely to mess up your hands.

Thomas: Well, sports I don't think really mess up my hands. Only thing that will probably mess up my hands is just getting injured. But like sports and everything, that's just if I take too much of it, maybe it will.

Q: So what do you do? What sports are your favorites?

Thomas: My favorite sport is basketball. I really love basketball. And I like baseball and football.

Q: Which one are you best in?

Thomas: I think I'm best at basketball. 'Cause baseball, sometimes I miss the ball, and then. Well, I think football is my second cause I can really throw the ball.

Q: You've got great hands for basketball. Got good stretch. And for playing.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: So your family has been very supportive of your performing.

Thomas: Well, my mother has been very supportive. Not my family. Just my mother. Because my brothers are grown and living away from home. My mother's been very supportive. She helped me get where I need to get, and still is helping me to get where I need to get. She bought me all the instruments so I can practice. And then, when I'm used to it, I get something different to better my skills and stuff, you know.

Q: What kind of vibes do you play?

Thomas: You mean the brand? The brand, the vibes that I got is a Musser, and it's a three octave instrument in silver. And recently, some weeks ago, I got me a 4.3 marimba, which is an Adams marimba. It's a nice performance instrument.

Q: So that will hold you for a while.

Thomas: Yeah. It would.

Q: Great. So what's the next step?

Thomas: The next step? I'm not sure, I know I got this audio software called an Audigy to hook up into my computer and that's supposed to like enhance my ability like making CDs and stuff, taking out the hissing. Basically making it professional.

Q: Right. Right. Have you been tempted to drift over into electronic music?

Thomas: I don't think so. I'm really not sure.

Q: You started to say.

Thomas: Well, I believe that in a way I am using electronics. But I'm not sure — maybe sound effects and stuff I'm using, but if I'm going to use electronics, it will probably be for something special or something.

Q: So you're talking about electronic enhancements rather than electronic instruments.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: It's a tempting world. You know, there's so much going on in that realm, and we probably haven't seen anything yet. So it must be fun to keep an eye on that, to see where that's going on.

Thomas: Yeah. It's fun in a way, but then it's like driving you in a way, because I see what's happening and I know what I got to do. So I have to practice to do that, and then, when something else comes up, then you've got to practice again, keep on doing what you're doing to do that. And then something else comes up, keep on practicing.

Q: So it goes back to what you were saying about needing to stay focused.

Thomas: Yeah. Just stay focused. Just pay attention to everything that comes at you because you don't want to miss any good opportunities.

Q: What is your feeling about the popular music scene today? I mean, who are the artists that you really enjoy listening to?

Thomas: Well, I don't really have a favorite, but I like listening to the music that is performed today 'cause I listen to their style, and I listen to every note, how they interpret it, how it makes the music different. Sometimes, they put a melody in, and it can probably fit for the major and the minor. So I listen for that. I listen for how rhythmic they are and I just listen to the harmonies.

Lately I've just been listening to that, just the music part.

Q: Who are some of the groups you've been following?

Thomas: Well, lately I've been following people from Murder, Inc. I think the producer's name is Jah Rule. I'm sure that's the producer. But I've been listening to his tracks, and I think he's very interesting 'cause he comes up with good R&B tracks. P Diddy, also known as Sean John Combs. I admire his business work because he's a producer. Everybody has their own style. When you listen to different styles, it's just very open. I can't find the words, but very open.

But I think you've just got to be very observant, and listen to the styles. But I don't really have a favorite. So I just listen to anything I hear.

And jazz also — I listen to Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker, I listen to him a lot. 'Cause the improvising is very fast, and I try to catch the notes sometimes, but it's very hard. So I just listen to the CD and keep on trying. And I listen to a lot of Lionel Hampton 'cause I admire his improvising also. He's very good, very talented.

Q: Now it's interesting to listen to his music and hear how it's changed over the years.

Thomas: I like his style too, because it's more of a blues style, but then he has a kind of a bebop improvising to it, and a jazz improvising. I think it goes well. It mixes very well.

Q: That's great. So how would you describe the music you're working on? Where do you think that falls in the musical spectrum?

Thomas: The music I'm working on? I'm really not even sure. I try to do different styles to expand my style, and so I'm not even sure. I think it's going to be all kinds. So I'm going to think about it.

Q: See where it takes you.

Thomas: Yeah. Later I'm going to find out where it takes me, and see what kind of style it is that I have.

Q: So do you feel like you're beginning to find your own voice?

Thomas: Yeah, I'm finding my voice 'cause I really want my name to be heard and I really want to become a producer. So I'm making songs and etc, and then later I'm going to write it and copyright it.

Q: So you're doing your own lyrics?

Thomas: Oh, I'm not doing lyrics.

Q: No lyrics.

Thomas: I'm just doing instrumentals.

Q: Are you interested in going there?

Thomas: Not me. 'Cause I'm not the type of person who would like to sing. Plus I can't sing, and so I'm not going to do something that I can't do. So I'm just going to stick with what I got, the instrumental, and later I'm hoping to create a band. I'm going to just stick with instrumentals.

Q: Seems like a wise choice. There are lots of singers. What kind of band? Are you talking about — a small combo?

Thomas: Actually I'm talking about both. Like to have a combo for the smaller jobs, and then when it's a very big event, I would have an orchestra.

Q: Well, that's great. How big an orchestra?

Thomas: I'm not sure. I'm really not sure.

Q: I mean if you could have your druthers and you could spend the next two weeks putting together a group, and you didn't have to worry about paying them.

Thomas: Probably very big. [Laughter] 'Cause I would probably want to make it sound professional.

Q: So when you talk about an orchestra, would you be using strings as well?

Thomas: No. Just a jazz orchestra.

Q: Why is it that the stringed instruments have never been a traditional part of the voice of jazz? I know there are exceptions, but they are exceptions.

Thomas: I think that strings are mostly used for classical. So I guess a lot of people see it as a classical instrument. Maybe that's why. But I'm really not sure. I mean, you can have a string in your jazz orchestra.

Q: You mean apart from the bass.

Thomas: Yeah. But I think a lot of people just see it as a classical instrument. They would probably only use it when they have something classical in their jazz piece or something.

Q: Billie Holiday had strings backing her up on one of her records.

Thomas: Really?

Q: I think she was one of the first jazz singers to do that. And it was a big departure. But I've always been curious about that. I used to play the viola, and I always wondered why weren't we welcomed there. There's always seemed to be this wall.

Thomas: Well, I'm not sure if it's a wall. I don't think it's like any separation — we can't have that because it doesn't mix with it. I mean, we can use it, but I'm really not sure. But I intend to use it for a lot of my songs. Maybe if I'm doing a piece that includes that instrument then I would probably have it in my orchestra.

Q: Oh it's something that I always wondered about.

Thomas: Yeah. That does make you wonder.

Q: They're great sounds.

Thomas: Yeah, they are. They're really mellow.

Q: So for the small combo that you were talking about that you would like to put together, what kind of instrumentation?

Thomas: Well, I would have the bass, the drums, piano — I'm not sure about piano, I think I'll probably have a guitarist, and maybe two to three horns. Just make it nice and compact.

Q: Sounds like a great combo. Have you thought of a name for it yet?

Thomas: No. I haven't.

Q: You would just use your own name?

Thomas: I might. People suggested that I should use my initials or something. But I'm not sure. I might name it based on how the band is, like the style it has as a whole.

Q: Sounds very. So what's next up on the performances?

Thomas: Well, next I'll be performing at Morgan State [University]. That's my next performance.

Q: Oh when is that?

Thomas: That is in September the 22nd, and I'll be performing on the marimba. I'm really looking forward to performing there.

Q: Oh that's great. Now at School for the Arts, are you, do you have to do a junior recital as part of your requirements there?

Thomas: A junior recital?

Q: A solo recital.

Thomas: Well, yeah, we have to. We have recitals every Wednesday. So if it's not our recital, then we're watching someone else's recital. So you just got to practice, make sure you don't lose track of the date — because they just keep it posted so you have to look for your name and the check the date and practice, and make sure you got everything that you need to get.

It's fun. I think it's fun performing for your classmates who are watching you perform, and watching how focused you are and how much you're concentrating and how much work you put into it. So, it's very good.

Q: Now, do you have a group that you perform with regularly at the School for the Arts?

Thomas: No, I don't have a group. But there's a group that I'm in that's called percussion ensemble, and it's just basically percussion ensemble, and we do like a lot of percussion songs that tell a story. Let's say you're using the vibraslap, you might think of the desert or something. Or if you hit a tubular bell, you might think you're in a church or something. So just you've got to back it up with different instruments to make it realistic.

Q: So do you like the ensemble performances? I know music students tend to fall in one of two categories. I mean, they're very focused on being soloists, and you have to do the ensembles, but you do it because you have to — not because it's a really great thing to do.

Thomas: Yeah. I also was in an ensemble called the Wind Ensemble. It's okay, but I wouldn't like to stick around in it. Percussion ensemble I really enjoy 'cause it's not the full band doing the storytelling. So it's just interesting how the percussion ensemble can do the same thing without the other instruments.

Q: Looking forward to when you get yourself established and producing your own music, do you think touring is going to be a serious part of that?

Thomas: I believe so. Well, I haven't really begun to think about the touring part yet. So I'm not sure.

Q: People forget about what hard work touring is.

Thomas: Yeah.

Q: The logistics and the planning.

Thomas: The choreography. I never really thought about it until you just mentioned it.

Q: The music scene has changed a lot over the course of the Twentieth Century. And there are so many more outlets now. When I was a little kid, we didn't have MTV.

Thomas: Oh yeah.

Q: And even the recorded music wasn't as easily available or as good as it is now. And with music so accessible electronically, I often wonder is touring going to be as popular as it is now. I mean, ninety percent of what you see at the big concerts is electronically produced. People probably watch the screens as much or more than they watch the performer, and it's all being brought to them by amplification. So, you kind of wonder.

Thomas: But, yeah, it really has changed cause just you think about it, everything like that was done in the past. I mean, it's still here, but it was more added to so as to make it like a different. I guess, I don't know if people didn't want to be the same, or just wanted to see what a different style would sound like. So I guess that's why — and like TV shows are just keeping up on what's coming out or who will be releasing at what date and things like that.

But yeah, it has changed.

Q: What, and in the time that you've been performing and paying attention to music there have been some changes? What have you really taken notice of? I mean, what do you thing are big?

Thomas: I remember people saying that rap and R&B and stuff like that originated from jazz. So when rap came out, there was more of a jazz feel to it. You know, more of a swinging feel to it. And they also included jazz samples into it. But now, like today, it's like more rap. I hardly even hear jazz in the rap now. So, you know, it's just different.

Q: That is interesting. Is it more focused on the poetry now?

Thomas: I think it is. It's like it's more focused, I think, on the chord changing, and the lyrics of the poetry and everything. And also they're worried about if the track is a nice track. So I think it's just trying to be different, I guess.

Q: What about what about hip hop?

Thomas: Hip hop? Hip hop, I'm not really sure about because I didn't really look that much into hip hop, and I haven't heard about people. I think hip hop originated from rap. I'm not sure. I think I'm kind of confused about the rap and the hip hop because I think the hip hop includes rap and singing. But I'm not sure yet. So I'm just like still trying to look into that.

Q: Well, let's see what else did I want to ask you? Oh, I wanted to go back and ask you about the steel band that you said that you worked with. Where was this and who directed that and how did you get involved in that?

Thomas: The steel band. That was closer to Greenmount Avenue, and it was a little Caribbean place that we always used to practice in. And the head of the steel band was Mr. Emerald Gray. I think a friend told my mother about the steel band, and she decided that we should just go one night and see what they're doing and to see if we can get into the band. So I don't really remember that far.

Q: Well, it's been a ways back.

Thomas: Yeah. That's what I think.

Q: And about long did you stay with them?

Thomas: I believe like a year or two. But I'm not sure. But I know it was like a good enough time.

Q: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Thomas: Yeah. I have three brothers and two sisters.

Q: And are there any more musicians?

Thomas: Yea, me and my father.

Q: That must be a relief — only one to buy instruments for.

Thomas: Yeah. [Laughter] 'Cause then if you had the whole family who was musically talented, that would be like more money you'd have to spend.

Q: Devastating. And just think of the racket.

Thomas: Yeah, like I want to practice now. I want to practice now!

Q: They must be really interested in following your career.

Thomas: Well, I don't know because I'm not really sure. I haven't really liked paid attention to it. I've just been focused. I wasn't worried about if my family was supporting me, but I really was worried about how my mom was supporting me. She's just been there from day one. But I haven't really worried about them. And I haven't seen them very much, but I won't let that bring me down. You just keep on rolling.

Q: So where are your brothers and sisters living?

Thomas: Well, one of my sisters is moving to Florida, and one still lives in New York. But the one who's moving to Florida right now, she's in California. And my brothers, they're all in Baltimore here.

Q: So next year you're going to be a sophomore.

Thomas: Well, this school year coming up I'm going to be a sophomore.

Q: And so probably by next year, you will have more or less narrowed down where you're going to go to school.

Thomas: Yeah. I think so.

Q: I'm just curious. I know that most people don't want to go to school in the town where they're living. Because part of the whole experience is getting away and, you know, getting in totally different surroundings. But have you thought about coming over here to Peabody after School for the Arts at all?

Thomas: I haven't really thought about it. But I remember coming here to Peabody for like lessons when I was younger. The person's name is Mr. Leo Lapage. He was also in the BSO, and I had lessons from him. But like after that, I haven't really thought about Peabody that much.

Q: Well, maybe you should come over and hear the jazz concerts and see how that goes. But it isn't far enough way. I know. So after college, are you looking at trying to establish a career here in Baltimore, or is California on the horizon or New York?

Thomas: I'm really not sure. Because after I go to college, I just know that I want to be a producer, but I'm not sure where I want to start that. I might just start it from the college like that I went to. 'Cause then like if I'm having trouble with something, I will probably go back and ask questions, prepare, what I need to improve on, just in case I have questions.

Q: Oh, that's a good strategy. Do you have any contact with any of the older vibe players here?

Thomas: No. Well, actually, I believe so. Well, I don't have contact with him, but I know him because he also used to attend Baltimore School for the Arts. His name is James Johnson, and he attends Peabody Institute. But I really don't have contact with him, but I mean I listen to him whenever he had a performance. But I wasn't able to make it to most of his performances. Just performances at the school. And a vibraphonist who went to School for the Arts also, but I think he's living in Boston because he went to Berklee. And his name is Warren Wolf.

I saw him when I went up there this summer because I went up there Boston for a music camp, and it was only for percussionists. I saw him at one of the performances. I could contact him. But if I see them, I would say hello. But I don't really have their phone numbers and talk to get together to do some kind of playing or something.

Q: Do you get to concerts much outside of performances at School for the Arts?

Thomas: Yeah. Well, my mom decided to decrease my performances so I can focus on how to adapt myself to the school and then getting used to it. I think that's it, basically — I think that's the answer — just changing myself. But yeah, I mostly give performances out of school. Well this was in June I had a performance, a school performance, but I don't have as many school performances as I did as outside school. Yeah, I have a lot of outside performances, but some of them are on weekdays after school which interferes with my homework.

Q: Well, it's summer.

Thomas: Yeah. I guess you've got to enjoy your vacation.

END OF INTERVIEW