Oral history interview with Dennis and Dale Melton, March 27, 2012

Melton, Dennis and Dale
Musicians, architects, and co-founders of Fine Times Magazine

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CAITLIN: Caitlin Davis interviewing Dennis and Dale Melton on March 27, 2012. So, feel free either to interject—well, it doesn’t matter.

MELTON: Okay.

CAITLIN: Explain your background. Are you guys originally from Delaware?

MELTON: We’re from northern Virginia—Winchester.

CAITLIN: Okay. When did you come up to Delaware?

MELTON: Well, it was probably, what, ’61?

MELTON: Yeah, around ’61. To Dover—Dover, Delaware.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: We spent our high school years in Dover.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And then went to the University of Delaware. That got us up to Newark.
CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And got involved in a lot of bands.

CAITLIN: Yeah, were you always interested in music, growing up?

MELTON: Yeah, we took piano lessons in Virginia. I think in some ways the transition from Virginia to Delaware was pretty rough for us at age thirteen or fourteen. In some ways I think that kind of drove us into getting interested in playing in a rock and roll band. Plus, the Beatles on Ed Sullivan show, you know. I mean, we almost literally—after we saw that—because we had both taken piano lessons.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: Yeah, we didn’t—we kind of kept up with it, but not really because we were getting to be teenagers, and that wasn’t so cool. Then we saw the Beatles, and we almost literally looked at each other and said, “Okay, who’s going to play bass, who’s going to play guitar?” That’s what we’re doing. We’re playing guitar, we’re playing bass, and we’re singing—and the girls would be wild about us. So we got a guitar, we got a bass, and almost as soon as we got those instruments, we formed some sort of band.

MELTON: Yeah, I think it was a—

CAITLIN: Did you take lessons or did you kind of learn as you kind of—

MELTON: Mostly by ear.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: Yeah, mostly by ear.

CAITLIN: So, was this during the time you were in Dover?

MELTON: Yes.

CAITLIN: Okay. And then you went—you both went—to the University of Delaware.

MELTON: Right. Then, the band just evolved. We formed a band called The Prodigals.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: While we were in high school.

MELTON: We were in high school, and our dad managed the band.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.
MELTON: And we played I guess mostly up and down the eastern shore, and I think we signed more autographs then than ever. Played a place called the Hullabaloo Club. Where was that?

MELTON: In Salisbury, Maryland.

MELTON: In Salisbury, Maryland, and I mean, this was just the Beatles and all this stuff, and we had longish hair, were dressing real hip, and rock and roll, and the kids were wild.

MELTON: We won the Battle of the Bands at Dover High School.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: I’ll never forget it because—you’re talking about kids being enthusiastic about it—somebody was caught stuffing the ballet box, so they determined the winner by applause.

CAITLIN: Applause.

MELTON: So we really felt like we were the Beatles, and everybody was screaming.

MELTON: Right.

MELTON: Said we were about the loudest one.

CAITLIN: That’s great.

MELTON: When we went to University of Delaware, we did some dates—the Prodigals stayed together some.

MELTON: Yeah, some.

MELTON: Somewhat. But that’s when we started meeting a lot of other musicians in the Wilmington area and started doing really more of our own original material—

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: —in addition to other songs.

CAITLIN: So with the Prodigals, you just played covers?

MELTON: Yes, mostly.

CAITLIN: Okay. So was this when you started the Melton Brothers Band, or—

MELTON: No, no.

CAITLIN: Okay. So what band are we in now?

MELTON: I would say the one that was most notable would be Autumn. Like the month.
CAITLIN: Right.

MELTON: It was an original band and played coffee shops, and we were doing our own thing.

CAITLIN: Okay. And this was around Newark?

MELTON: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: Newark, yeah. Then the most notable one after that was joining the Watson Brothers Band.

MELTON: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Who I’ve trying to get ahold of—I’ve emailed Gary—


CAITLIN: I’ve e-mailed him a few times and he hasn’t gotten back to me.

MELTON: Show up at Fairfax later during the day.

CAITLIN: Is that where he works?

MELTON: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Okay. I’ll come with the tape recorder.

MELTON: And then his brother’s in California. So we played in the Watson Brothers Band for a while. That was great. We played at places like the Blue Boar Inn and Art, and the Bill, at the Mendenhall—Blue Boar—I’m sure some of the other band folks have talked about that place. They go back as far as we do. That was really amazing.

CAITLIN: Okay. That was in Arden?

MELTON: Yeah, in Arden—the Blue Boar, yeah. Carmines, Blue Boar Inn, and the Mill and the Mendenhall, those were the main ones we played back then. Some of the other bands were really hot then.

CAITLIN: So what time period is this around? If you can remember! It doesn’t—

MELTON: I’d say around ’70 or ’72?

CAITLIN: Okay, so early ’70s.

MELTON: Yeah, when did we go to—
MELTON: Because we were at the University of Delaware when—about ’65 or ’66, so we were there three or four years, so—then we did go to Woodstock in ’69.

CAITLIN: Really? That’s funny that you mention that because I was just watching the documentary. It was on TV a few nights ago!

MELTON: Oh, good for you!

CAITLIN: Me and my step-mom were watching it.

MELTON: Well that [inaudible] the thing because the August band went in ’69.

MELTON: Yeah.

MELTON: Because we lived in what we call the “band house,” which was ’68 or ’69, probably was that.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: So we rehearsed in the house and lived in the house, and George Starkid would come over, too.

CAITLIN: Oh, really?

MELTON: Yeah. And we would just say—I think we knew that one day the festival was going on, and we had a VW van, the [inaudible] bus, and we’d say to ourselves, “Let’s go!” And so, not the whole band, but—

MELTON: About five or six of us.

MELTON: —got to go. And I’ll never forget it because you could get in just so far, and then you had to walk in. So you’re walking along these isolated country roads like a pack, with kids, and then once you got to it—it had been kind of raining, so you could smell the mud. Then you got into this big open field and it went over this hill. And then you looked down and there’s this big stage, and The Who are playing. We were like, “Oh my God!” It was very surreal. And an amazing little tidbit at that event was, the only musician that we knew when we lived in Winchester, Virginia—we were kind of—we were right in front of the stage and ran into them. All those people. Only musician we ever knew in Winchester, Virginia. Crazy.

CAITLIN: Small world.

MELTON: Right. It was fun. And when did we go to Woodstock? I mean, that was ’69, but I mean—oh, you mean the move—

MELTON: Not the festival, but the recording deal!
MELTON: Yeah, so we did move to Woodstock, or Berryville, New York, which was near Woodstock.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: That had to have been in the ‘70s or something. Or real early ‘70s.

CAITLIN: And why did you move there?

MELTON: Dazed and crazed!

MELTON: Well, no, no! This is finally just—

MELTON: More specifically, it was Downstate Delaware who got a record deal.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And he had already recorded one record, and it didn’t take off, and he changed up his band. Got new band members. We were part of the new band members, and he wanted a second record, so we were asked to come up to Berryville, and we saw Harry and lived there in a lodge in the mountains and played and recorded music where the group as a band did their stuff. And the band was doing—they were doing the *Cahoots* album then. Right. They were recording the *Cahoots* album, and Jessie Fredrick who we were recording with was on Capital Records.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And we played a few things with them. We played a couple concerts with them. Not really a tour, and the record did not take off, so that didn’t [inaudible] the band.

CAITLIN: So then you moved back to Delaware?

MELTON: Yeah. Right.

MELTON: Dale came back to Delaware. I went off to Toronto and met—actually, I went—you know, small world—I was invited up there by a guitar player, Chuck Herrings, who was with us with the August group. He had moved up to Canada and teamed up with a partner, and they were producing records up there. So I went up and joined them for a couple of years and actually recorded a few records while I was up there and worked with Sheryl Eckhart, who did—she had written a song for Bonnie Raitt—“Somethin’ to Talk About”—that is a hit. At the time, she was just 19 years old, a young singer, and did a record with her and cross-Canada tour. And I did a few other records. It was a great time. So we were—that was a period of time where Dale and I were not playing in a band together, whereas really most of our time, we had—

CAITLIN: You’d been together.

MELTON: Yeah. So we didn’t at that time.
CAITLIN: Again, when was the Melton Brothers?

MELTON: When did the Melton Brothers really happen? So I guess after the record deal, we really got going for Watson Brothers because it was right after the Watson Brothers that we formed the Melton Brothers.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: We formed the Melton Brothers Band with Alfie Moss.

CAITLIN: Whom I sent e-mail to and she didn’t respond.

MELTON: She was here yesterday!

CAITLIN: Was she? Well you’ll have to put in a good word for me!

MELTON: Oh yeah? She would have loved it. She’d love to talk to you! So that would have been—that really built up toward 1979 when we released an LP with Alfie, which was in ’79. So I don’t know how many years we were with her before that. Maybe three?

MELTON: Or less.

MELTON: Maybe less. Maybe two years, but— so maybe—

MELTON: Yeah, ’77.

MELTON: Yeah, maybe ’77, ’78, ’79. We played a lot of places with her, released that record, and that was very fun.

MELTON: Yeah.

CAITLIN: And that was living in the city?

MELTON: Right. Yeah.

CAITLIN: So the late ’70s you formed the Melton Brothers? Right afterward—

MELTON: Yeah, that’s right. And we first formed it with Alfie, but ever since we formed the Melton Brothers, there’s always been a Melton Brothers, with or without Alfie.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: With different folks. We’ve had the Melton Brothers and Friends or just the Melton Brothers—whatever—in a sense, in one form or the other.

CAITLIN: Good to know. You guys have a lot of history! A lot of different bands.

MELTON: Yeah.
MELTON: I auditioned for Todd Rundgren’s *Utopia* tour—

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

MELTON: —and failed the audition.

CAITLIN: Oh. I’m sorry!

MELTON: Well he ended up using Moogy Klingman, which was a guy he always used, and I didn’t understand why he wouldn’t use another keyboard player because along the way I switched to keyboards.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: I played guitar, keyboards, and then [inaudible].

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: But at that time I was playing keyboards. I often wonder what would have happened with my life had I made that audition, part of that—

CAITLIN: My step-mom actually used to know him when they were younger because he—she was good friends with his younger sister. She said that he was different. He was a different kind of kid back then. Then he became famous!

MELTON: Yeah? Yeah, sure did!

CAITLIN: So, I guess, how old were you when you started the Melton Brothers?

MELTON: When we started the Melton Brothers? I don’t know when that would be. Late 20s?

CAITLIN: Late 20s?

MELTON: Yeah, late 20s. Yeah, that’s close enough.

CAITLIN: Yeah, you don’t have to be specific. Who else was in the band, or was it just you guys?

MELTON: When we first formed the Melton Brothers—

CAITLIN: It was Alfie.

MELTON: Yes, Alfie. Tyron Wilson was on drums. That was the group that did the album, and also on the album we had [William] Washboard Bill [Allman] always played a pretty big role in our musical life, too. Some incarnations of the Melton Brothers have been my brother and I and Washboard Bill. Yeah. So that would be the Melton Brothers with Washboard Bill.

MELTON: Right.
MELTON: As opposed to the Melton Brothers with Alfie Moss. Now, did Hank Carter play on the record with us?

MELTON: I don’t remember.

MELTON: I don’t know. He played a lot with us.

MELTON: Around the time the record happened and all that, we played a show in Philadelphia at Rittenhouse Square. It was outdoors. And we were sort of an afterthought. The cameramen knew us really well. They’d say, “Hey, one of the bands bowed out. Can you guys get up here and be part of the show?” “Sure!” And we were playing last because we were going to fill out the time—and nobody really—in Philly, they didn’t know us very well, and they started taking everything down when we started playing. But we were really hot! And once we started playing, they went “Whoa!” and they started putting everything back together again, video and all that kind of stuff. I guess there was filming at that time. And then it was shown a number of times on Channel 12 and the USA Network.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay!

MELTON: Like, many times. There wasn’t a small concert venue in the Philadelphia region that didn’t want us. So we immediately started playing this circuit of venues from the Main Point to—what are some of those other places? The Tin Angel—did we play the Tin Angel?

MELTON: I don’t know!

MELTON: It was a place that he had before the Tin Angel. It’s on our website, all these places we used to play. It was—we were just packing. Every time we’d play, we’d pack it, and this was with Alfie and Tyron. The Melton Brothers, we really took off. We were playing the best venues we’d ever played and packing in. A lot of excitement with the record and with the TV shows and all that kind of stuff, so we remained quite hot for three or four years—something like that. And as things go, they—personalities change and a lot, and—

CAITLIN: Where did you play in Wilmington?

MELTON: The Wilmington places—now that kind of shifts into places like Oscars—that was a place we played a lot in downtown Wilmington—yeah, that was probably the primary place we played. There was the Greenery, [inaudible] Street. What was Bob’s place called?

CAITLIN: Craputure Lane?

MELTON: Yeah, that was it! So these have come up before?

CAITLIN: Yeah, Barn Door?

MELTON: Yeah. Oh yeah. We were the band to get to the bathroom.

CAITLIN: Really?
MELTON: Yeah. Okay, the Barn Door was a really fun place—some other places. And then during that period we would play the Cabaret Club in West Chester, and the Turkside Tavern in West Chester, and in those days, George was just starting out, so George would play one weekend at the Turkside Tavern. And this was a really little place. What could you get—40 people in the place or something?

MELTON: It was really small.

MELTON: And George Sturgess playing there one weekend, we’re playing there the next weekend—I don’t know if Hooters had been formed then, but some of the kind of bands in the area were playing this tiny little hole in the wall. But it was just so much fun. Such a great place.

MELTON: Yeah.

MELTON: And really the—I mean, everywhere we played, it was happening! It was just amazing. I think a lot of that had to do with the fact that it was driven by the Baby Boomers. We were all Baby Boomers. It’s the largest volume of human beings in American history. And we were all young and the music scene worldwide—it was the Beatles, the Stones, and on and on and on, so it was just—it was probably the thing that most young people were interested in because it was just exploding all over the world! And so we were the local version of all that. And I’m sure—I suspect that was the case in many parts of the country—many parts of the world. And so it was really a lot of great bands, a lot of venues. I mean, downtown Wilmington—on a particular night, there’d be six or eight venues with six or eight bands packed. And then the Loop, which is still going on today.

MELTON: I think they do two a year now. But, see, at that time there were more than eight venues! There were probably—now that I think of it—there were probably twelve in downtown Wilmington. So many that, as the magazine—you know, being kind of a hub of all this—we formed this loop that tied it all together, so there was a monthly loop that promoted all the venues and all the bands, and there was a bus going from place to place, even though they were all close enough that you could walk to them. It was just part of the promotion. It was just a scene. I think it was partially because of the talent that was in the Wilmington area, the bands, the fact that the magazine and the promotions were really fueling it all.

MELTON: A lot of restaurant tours.

CAITLIN: It was hotter than Philadelphia!

MELTON: A lot of restaurant tours that were really did it as a labor of love, not realizing that it’d be sustained and they would burn out eventually. I think it was tough for them to make good money. But it was great fun. Wilmington was hotter than Philly at the time, and Philly recognized it. They’d come down and go “Why? Why is this happening?” And then the outdoor cabarets were promotions that were done on the mall, right in front of the Grand Opera House. Take up the whole block and roping it off on both ends. How many years was that?

MELTON: Three or four years of cabarets.
CAITLIN: And was it in the summer?

MELTON: No, there were—how many were there? I remember one time, it was pretty cold. It might have been March or something.

MELTON: Yeah, I mean, there were—I mean, we might have done four a year? Something like that?

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And so what it did was it brought all the bands together that were hot in the greater Wilmington area and what the venues did—they came in and set up tables and offered food. So again, it was a promotion of the whole scene in one big concert. I think the biggest one drew 8,000 people

CAITLIN: Whoa!

MELTON: And they normally would draw two or three thousand. And it got so big that—because the people at the magazine ran it—and it got so big that it was too much for us. It was too much. It was scary. We needed more police.

CAITLIN: Yeah, did you have to get special permits and everything like that?

MELTON: Yeah, oh yeah! And it was—

MELTON: It did become hard to manage.

MELTON: Alcohol was sold and food, and everybody was young and crazy. It got to be—even managing the money was really crazy then. And it got to be just pretty nuts to handle, so Electric Factory Concerts took it over, it got so big. But they moved it.

CAITLIN: So did you sell it to them, or how did that happen?

MELTON: I’m not sure we sold it. We should have.

MELTON: A lot of us wanted to start thinking about it. Dennis was saying, you know, even some of the venues—everyone was just so caught up in how cool it was, and how much fun it was. I don’t think enough of us were smart business wise. We probably could have made a pretty good deal with Electric Factory Concerts, but they actually moved it to a bigger location almost right away, and there weren’t many after that. I think one of the lessons that they learned and a lot of us learned about the Wilmington scene—and I think this is kind of important to your thing—is that it really was best when it was all about Wilmington, and it was all about the bands in Greater Wilmington—Newark, West Chester area—as opposed to bringing the names out of Philly or bigger than that. It was—it was really its own hot spot of great music, and it really started to fall apart when it got beyond that.

CAITLIN: How many bands usually participated?
MELTON: At the cabarets? I’m thinking eight or ten. One right after the other. And if somebody was missed on one, we’d be sure to include them on the next one. And certainly—

CAITLIN: My pen just ran out of ink. Could you get me another? How did you get the community to get involved with the outdoor cabarets?

MELTON: Well, a key person, Donna Marie Smith.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: A lot of the time, we weren’t sure if she should be working for the magazine or working for the city, but she was an employee of the city, and was somebody that we all knew and somebody that was very excited about all this.

CAITLIN: What did she do? What was her position?

MELTON: She was probably something like Events Coordinator for the city. So she—

CAITLIN: Donna Marie Smith?

MELTON: Donna Marie Smith. So she was our liaison with the city. She actually rolled up her sleeves and worked on the Loops and the outdoor cabarets and everything, and all of it was embracing everything—the bands, the city, the venues, the restaurants, everything. And so it wasn’t really—I guess that’s where we weren’t smart business-wise but it made it better because we weren’t trying to—okay, this is our little chiefdom and we—

CAITLIN: So it wasn’t about that.

MELTON: It wasn’t about that at all. And we made a logo called Wilmington Alive—

CAITLIN: Oh, I remember seeing that.

MELTON: Which was a part of just promoting Wilmington. One of the songs that we wrote and was on our record became sort of a theme, and it was called “Going Back to Willingtow.” The original name was Willingtown. And it had a kind of ’30s, ’40s flavor to it, which was harking back to when Wilmington was actually called Willingtow, and I’m sure—I mean, some of the bands—a lot of the bands—either wrote songs promoting Wilmington, promoting Delaware. I mean, Newark, Delaware—that was just our part of it.

MELTON: I remember, too, that we would jam with each other! And the local bands jamming together and doing a final song together, which was great. And that was something that didn’t happen as much once some of the other outside groups came in.

CAITLIN: Right.

MELTON: Sort of divided that grassroots approach to a—we were a really strong family of bands.
CAITLIN: Yeah, I was going to say, so there weren’t really any rivalries? I mean, that’s natural, but you all supported each other?

MELTON: Yeah, and we enjoyed jamming with each other as opposed to just—here’s your group and this is our group.

CAITLIN: What bands do you remember jamming with?

MELTON: Johnny Neal, for example.

CAITLIN: I contacted him and his agent, and he said he was interested in talking to me and we need to set up a time.

MELTON: Oh, good! So, you know, Johnny Neal, and the guys from Jack of Diamonds, and the Watson Brothers and the Melvin Brothers. Sin City Band. You know, all of those bands jammed together at times, sat in with each other. Those are the ones I remember mostly. And of course there were a lot more—literally on the nights that there were the loops, on a break we’d go over and watch where another band was playing—sit in, watch or sit in—whatever. It was an amazing time. Just amazing. And of course we were all going to make it big.

CAITLIN: Of course! Did you ever feel like between you two there was any competition? In regards to music.

MELTON: Not so much with music, I guess. Not really.

CAITLIN: Not trying to stir up any trouble?

MELTON: There were times, I guess, in the Melton Brothers Band situations where whatever the unit was, it would run its course. And I think sometimes at the end of those, there would be a little tension between us, but it was always—it was only because something had to give because it had run its course. That’s the only tension that I can think of.

MELTON: Yeah.

MELTON: I mean, occasionally we’d disagree over what songs to do, but not much. But some of that. “Nah, we shouldn’t do that song!”

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: Or “We played—that sucked!” But really, no, we didn’t really—that’s part of being brothers and twins. You think a lot alike!

CAITLIN: Do people have a hard time telling you apart?

MELTON: Yes and no.

CAITLIN: I think you look different. Like, I can tell you apart.
MELTON: Yes and no. I think it’s more that people are confused about who is who as opposed to someone—but even now, you know, somebody will—I’m in Kenneth so much, and I know more people in Kenneth than Dale does, so when Dale’s in Kenneth, somebody might come up and say, “Hey, Dennis!” But a lot of them say, “Yeah, I didn’t really think it was you.” I didn’t know anyone else that looked remotely like you! And then I said, “You know, I had a mustache for 30 years!” Oh yeah! I didn’t know you had a mustache! And the Watson Brothers Band, people would get them confused, and they’re not twins. They don’t look anything alike. One’s taller than the other. I mean, it’s totally—

MELTON: And they would get them confused. And they’d get them confused with us! So it’s just some of it—it’s just that sort of stuff.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: Are we pulling you away from your questions?

CAITLIN: No, no, it’s fine. I’m used to this. Most people—they do this—and then I think of other questions that I should have asked, so it’s good that you kind of go with the flow and then—so I guess Fine Times originally started out as the newsletter for the Melton Brothers Band? Is that correct?

MELTON: That’s correct. It was our band mailing list.

CAITLIN: Okay, so it wasn’t called Fine Times.

MELTON: No, it was before the Internet, before e-mail and all that stuff, so the way you get the word out is you mail something, and all the bands were doing it, so we had a little mailer that had our dates on it, and we would build up a mailing list, and everywhere we’d play we’d have people sign up for the mailing list. But hen at some point we had a really strong mailing list, and I don’t know where exactly it started—but one of the venues would say, “Can I say something about what we’re doing at our restaurant on your mailing list?”

CAITLIN: Oh, gotcha! Yeah.

MELTON: And then somebody like Sin City—they were like, “I can see you’ve got this other venue on your mailing list. Would you mind if we put our calendar on your mailing list and we’ll give you our—”

CAITLIN: So it kind of kept on going and going and going?

MELTON: The marketing head in my brain started going. And I went “Hmm?” And then I started going really to solicit it. Then it was a mission of; “Okay, get all the bands on it, get all the venues on it, and make it an expanded newsletter.” We weren’t thinking magazine at first. And it was just very crude—

CAITLIN: Yeah.
MELTON: —in the beginning.

CAITLIN: How long were you together before you came out with your newsletter?

MELTON: The band? Oh goodness.

CAITLIN: Was it right away? Did you know that you needed something like that, or was it after a few years?

MELTON: When did Fine Times actually start, do you know?

CAITLIN: I know, I’ve used—I have it somewhere written down.

MELTON: [inaudible] I think of it in terms of when we did the record Without Me.

MELTON: Fine Times was, as I recall, it was like ’80 to ’83 or ’84. I think the first—I think the band was only in existence the first year of Fine Times. It shifted gears. Like I said, the Melton Brothers was in some form ever since then, and we just—well, we had a falling out with Alfie, and the Melton Brothers became Tyron Wilson on the drums and Dennis and I—and we’d add a horn or something like that. So we kept it going like that and it morphed into something else, but with Alfie it probably lasted only the first year of Fine Times, but the mailing list was probably happening over a year or year and a half before it actually became Fine Times.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And when it did, it just happened really quickly. And then it was a matter of “Oh my God! We have to make this bigger because we think there’s so much that’s going to be in it! We need photographers, I think we need an art director, I think we need editors.”

CAITLIN: How did you plan that process? You said the band was over for that time period, and did this Fine Times become your main focus?

MELTON: Well no, no.

MELTON: Actually, Fine Times was not my focus at all. When that started to take off, I remember saying to Dennis, I said, “Do you want to be a part of this?”

CAITLIN: And then you didn’t want to be.

MELTON: No. One minor point of tension when it started to grow—before it had even become Fine Times yet—looking to Dale and saying, “Dale, this is our band calendar!” And I remember one point, as it grew, I said, “All these bands are in this month, but we’re not in the calendar this month, so what happened?” So I was kind of in the—standing in the sidelines kind of—what’s going on. But it’s true that our band wasn’t as active then because Alfie had left. We were still doing gigs but it wasn’t as much.

MELTON: Yeah. It wasn’t as much.
CAITLIN: When your brother was working on *Fine Times*, what were you doing?

MELTON: Well, I went off to architectural school at [inaudible].

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: So I was still very much concentrated on doing that and—but we were still playing.

MELTON: Oh yeah!

MELTON: But it wasn’t as focused as before, and neither one of us were focusing as much time on it as before because Dale was involved in *Fine Times* and other things. I was going to architectural school, and I was doing some part time other business, so—

CAITLIN: So life. Life happened.

MELTON: Right. We have to make a living. But I’m saying the first year of *Fine Times*, we were playing. We were playing quite a bit, and we were part of everything. We were on all the cabarets, we were at the loops, you know. And like I said, Alfie was a part of it that whole first year. But the way it happened was the way I was telling you—the way everything happened—people just realized that our newsletter was getting big. And literally, Michael Stack who was the art director just came up to me somewhere at a club or whatever and said, “You need this thing to look better!”

CAITLIN: Michael Stack?

MELTON: Michael Stack! But you know, I think it was before Michel, it was—no, there were two guys before Michael that did that. That’s right. John McPeters and—who’s the other guy, I can’t remember his name—I’ll remember his name.

CAITLIN: Okay, yeah.

MELTON: Because these are all important. That’s right. The two of them—the two of them came up to me in the bar or something like that and said, “This newsletter has got to look better or it’s not going to—you need help.” And Michael Stack designed our album cover in ’79. Right. And so shortly after these two guys got on board and helped me with it, it was still a newsletter, but when Michael Stack got involved, it became a magazine. Michael got even more serious about it. He said, “This needs to look like a magazine.

CAITLIN: And that’s when you started adding the articles.

MELTON: Right. I mean, it always had little snippet articles in it, but Bob Bowersox—

CAITLIN: Yeah, I knew—right. Explain his role.

MELTON: I knew Bob—you know, actually played in a band with him and Gary Watson—and we went to New York City and tried to make it.
MELTON: So you guys were doing that when I was in Canada.

MELTON: Dennis was in Canada. I was in New York City with Bob Bowersox and Gary Watson doing his material and trying to make it. And then we’d come back and do something with Bob and do some of his material and that’s when we got some of the members of the bands transferred to do background vocals on one of Bob’s things. So one of the great things is riding around in a taxi, and three members of the Manhattan Transfer singing their hearts out in the backseat. And we went to see them at a club before they made it big, and that was really cool. So all of this was still really connected. So I knew Bob really well, and he was another one that said, “Dale, this copy’s got to be better. We can make these real articles.” So he came in as the editor, and Mike Stack became the art director. Then guys were showing up at the gigs taking pictures, and so they’d come in and say, “I want to be a staff photographer.”

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

MELTON: “Here are some photographs. This looks better than the junk you’re putting in there.” So that’s what happened. Everyone just saw that this could be a really wonderful.

CAITLIN: Everyone wanted to get involved.

MELTON: And they all just came in and said, “Hey!” And I would say, “Well, there isn’t any money.” And then we did start to figure out how to create revenue.

CAITLIN: How to pay people and—

MELTON: And that was advertising.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And so it did start to create some revenue. People were paid and there were staff people. It did become a business. But it never really made money. As soon as it seemed like there was enough money to say that somebody could make money, we decided to make it better rather than anything else.

CAITLIN: Did you have a headquarters? Or where did you do all this work?

MELTON: Well, yeah! It was originally in my house.

MELTON: And I remember when it was overtaking your house!

CAITLIN: Stuff everywhere!

MELTON: Yeah, it was overtaking the house.

MELTON: What, was it about this size?

MELTON: The kitchen became the art room, the [inaudible] moved out.
MELTON: Right. It had taken over the house, and so we went to downtown Wilmington to look for some space, and there was some space on the third floor in King Street. The number comes to mind. 636 King Street or something like that.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: And we got a really good deal on it and renovated it to suit us, and that was pretty much it.

CAITLIN: How did you find out about, like, printers and all that stuff? Did people just volunteer to help you?

MELTON: No! Let me see—once we got off of doing it at a local 8.5 by 11 sheets running through, we printed it at Dover Post down at Dover. They sent it—down at that point it was, you know, flats that were waxed. You know, the pieces? That kind of stuff. And so it was printed at Dover Post. I think the reason that was done is I really checked every possibility, and they were the best price. And we had a distribution set up.

CAITLIN: Yeah, where did you choose sell the—or was it originally free?

MELTON: Yeah, it was free.

CAITLIN: And it was kind of—

MELTON: Well, every venue had—it started out this big, and then it went to magazine size, and then it went—

CAITLIN: And then it got big. Yeah.

MELTON: And every—stacks were left at all the venues, and we did start doing newsstand type of boxes and we sold them there because it was the only way to get in those locations. All this is starting to come back. So we’d have them at those locations, you know, trying to find ways to warn them out, and now a number’s coming to mind. I think our biggest circulation was 30,000.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: It was 30,000 units a month. And so everything got expensive at that point. We got sponsors for the events, and we were trying to figure out more and more ways of getting money. So while Dennis was becoming an architect—and I’m sure at times you were kind of wondering—what is that brother of mine doing the newspaper business? This *Fine Times* magazine ultimately became an ad agency.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: So that became my business. I got—and I actually had been schooled in communications and advertising and that sort of thing, so when I began to see that I had a art director that was as good as anybody in Wilmington and writers and photographers and all
these—I mean, we were not doing ourselves on the magazine, but what that translated to was really good work that could be competitive in the Wilmington market and any of the ad agencies there. And that’s what it translated to. It turned into an ad agency, so then that became—as the Baby Boomers got older and had kids, and as this whole scene began to collapse, Dennis was an architect, and I was an ad man. I had my ad agency. So we came out of it with these careers.

CAITLIN: Yeah, on top—

MELTON: And the commonality, of course, was that we continued to do the music, and my only involvement with *Fine Times* was as it related to the music. And for a while, there was a slight architectural connection because I wrote an article periodically on solar energy for *Fine Times*. Right?

CAITLIN: Oh, okay!

MELTON: Probably. That’s right. I’d say twelve or so of them.

MELTON: But I was really not involved with *Fine Times* or really what came after it, and that’s something that Dale and I really wanted to pay attention to—that the music thing that we did together that we really liked doing together. And we wanted to be careful not to do too many other things, particularly business things because we never wanted business to get in the way of the music. And it never has.

MELTON: Right. It really never has.

CAITLIN: Why was it called “Fine Times”?

MELTON: I do remember why it was called *Fine Times*. I was sitting at the bar in Oscars, and there was this young lady who was a real big fan of Oscars. She was always there. I can’t remember her name, but she was there a lot, and she was really into the scene. And I was going around always saying, “What are we going to call this thing? It’s not the Melton Brothers mailing list anymore. What are we going to call this thing?”

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: And she said, “What about ‘Fine Times’?” Just like that. Just like that!

CAITLIN: I don’t believe it! That sounds too good to be true!

MELTON: No, it’s true!

MELTON: It’s true! She said “How about Fine Times?” And I don’t know where she came up with that or—it wasn’t like she was writing down a whole bunch of things or anything.

CAITLIN: Yeah.
MELTON: Because I was doing that. You know? I was writing “How about this?” The staff—or the people who were starting to do this thing—were writing all kinds of stuff. She just came out with—she might have had a couple of suggestions—but she suggested “How about Fine Times?” And for some reason it struck me. For two ways, really. On a classier side, because Wilmington was a pretty classy place. It still is. The word “Fine Times,” good times, fine times—that sort of thing. All of us who were getting a bit high in this whole process—there was the magazine *High Times*, so it did have the sort of double meaning. So if you were into the sort of “getting high” thing, you could look at it that way if you were into a classier person. Just a way of saying “good times,” fine times. So we just went back to the staff and said “What do you think?” and everybody said—I don’t think anybody was jumping up and down about it. Everybody was just like, “Okay. Go with it. Let’s write the articles and take the pictures. Michael, go make the logo *Fine Times* and put it on the front of the magazine!”

CAITLIN: How did you decide which bands would be featured, or did you just include everyone, or did they have to be somewhat well known?

MELTON: Well, Bob had the most to do with that. I mean, Bob Bowersox pretty much became—

CAITLIN: So is he the one I should talk to about this?

MELTON: Yes because Bob became the editor and made most of those decisions. I didn’t want to be involved in all of that because I had the Melton Brothers. I was also sitting in with a lot of the bands.

CAITLIN: You didn’t really want to be involved in it.

MELTON: Bob wasn’t in a band at the time, so he could insulate himself from those decisions. But I know that we’d sit around and talk about it, and a lot of the reason for doing it, really, was to get all of the bands that were really doing something or trying to make something happen beyond the want to be predominantly displayed. It wasn’t one of these things of—I mean, we did start at one point having named people on the cover. Somebody big that was playing at the Grand Opera House. It always needed to be related. And Bob can tell you all this. It needed to be related to Wilmington—greater Wilmington, you know—New Castle county, [inaudible], even West Chester. So we would never pick a big name artist unless they were playing that area. And then we would interview them. I mean, we had—who was the lead singer? There were so many. James Brown. People of that level. And on and on and on. A lot of them played the Grand Opera House, and we were able to get interviews with these folks and that kind of stuff.

So the magazine at a point did start to feature at these higher levels. And you can ask Bob about this, but I think part of Bob’s motivation for that was making *Fine Times* more competitive with the *Rolling Stone*. I think that was a reach, but I wouldn’t say that it was impossible. My thing always was the local thing. Personally I was all about embracing the local thing. Bob did have visions of *Fine Times* being bigger than a local thing, and maybe competing with *Rolling Stone* at some point. I never had that vision for it, but I would say “Okay! Yeah! Give it a go, we’ll see what can happen!” So the later period of *Fine Times*, it did start to feature more named artists on
the cover. In the earlier stages of Fine Times, that was not the case. It was always the regional groups. But then things like The Hooters would happen. They were on two of our covers at least. You’d see a band that legitimately was taking off like the Hooters, like George Thorogood. And I think that was partially Bob’s “Okay, okay, now we have the Hooters!” They’re not James Brown, but they’re headed there. So let’s give this magazine more legitimacy and get them on. But you can talk to Bob about that.

CAITLIN: Okay! I don’t know if Bob was involved in this or you, but I noticed that you would have, like, lists of bands and people could vote.

MELTON: Best Of?

CAITLIN: Yeah, what was that about?

MELTON: Well, that was—I mean, a lot of times, with the outdoor cabarets and the loops were a way to—for all of us local bands who were going to make it big—to celebrate ourselves and kind of feel like that. Okay, we weren’t on the cover of Rolling Stone, but we were on the cover of Fine Times magazine. We weren’t playing the big arenas, but we were playing the outdoor cabarets. We weren’t playing the Troubadour in California, but we were playing the [inaudible] in downtown Wilmington. So in many ways the scene—because Dennis and I had a semi-taste of the big time with that record deal. We opened for some—you know, Purple Haram and the—BB King and The Brother—a lot of acts, and we got a taste of how crazy that is. As a band, we all did something for Peter Yarrow—you know, Peter Paul and Mary—people were in and out of the scene, all that kind of stuff. It certainly wasn’t any better than the Wilmington scene. Not as good.

MELTON: Yeah. The truth of the matter is—our perception is, when we started to climb that ladder a little bit, you know—Berryville, Woodstock—and in Canada, same thing. It was just the people in the music business were not very nice people. And we had more control over what we were doing in Wilmington, and there were some nice people there. And it was very different, so we—and part of it, I guess, was we didn’t really break through, so—

MELTON: Right. It was easier to say, “That stuff’s no good.”

MELTON: Right. “That’s just a bunch of crap!” But, you know, it was just a great scene. And so it was really—it was always—

MELTON: I’ve enjoyed coming back here.

MELTON: You know. Best guitar player of the year.

CAITLIN: Yeah, you might be given like the little plaque, or—

MELTON: All that came out of—like, there was the Grammy’s. That was our Grammy’s. So that was our local Grammy’s. And in many ways, Fine Times emulated all these things—the Rolling Stones and the Grammy’s, the concerts—all that kind of stuff. And I suspect, though I
can’t pin-point, but I suspect that kind of thing is going on in a lot of pockets all over the country because if you were to walk into Oscars or [inaudible] or any of these venues when one of the better bands—or even any of the bands—and some were better than others—and they’d just written some great material and they were going to make it big. And they had some contacts in New York. You walk into a place like that—what you felt that night was probably as exciting as any place you could go—anywhere on the planet. And I think that was probably the case in Atlanta and other cities.

It was just—it was just one of those times where all the planets aligned, and it was a huge—

CAITLIN: I like that. All the planets aligned!

MELTON: Yeah, and it was this huge—there was a huge population of young people who had the power. I mean, the Boomers have always had more power than they should have, really, for their own good. And at that time, we did! So, if we wanted to listen to music and—for those of us who were playing—spend way too much of our time playing—we got damn good, you know! And any of us could have made it. It’s just most of that is timing, and so the music was fantastic, and the experience was fantastic for anybody who was going out and enjoying it. So we deserved our own Grammy’s, we deserved our own magazine, we deserved our own promotions. And that was just that part of it. I mean, there were other concerts going on. I mean, what was going on at the Stone Balloon in Newark was incredible, and it was a great venue for—it wasn’t just Fine Times and the outdoor cabaret and the loops. That was just Wilmington.

There was stuff going on in Newark, there was stuff going on in West Chester. There was a lot of stuff going on in Philly. You know, I don’t mean to say that we were the center of the world.

CAITLIN: I know what you mean.

MELTON: But we were.

MELTON: It felt like it.

MELTON: And I think for bands like The Hooters, Thorogood and others, they probably felt like that was the center of the world.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: They were on the rise. And it’s all very exciting.

CAITLIN: Did you notice people started treating you differently after you were in charge of Fine Times, or not really?

MELTON: Not really. I wasn’t—I was always—from a public standpoint, personally, I was always interested in being a musician—

CAITLIN: Okay.
MELTON: —and playing in the band. I didn’t go places to be Mr. *Fine Times*, you know?

CAITLIN: Yeah, okay!

MELTON: I was there at the outdoor cabarets, but I was working.

CAITLIN: Yeah, you were more behind-the-scenes guy. Was Bob behind the scenes?

MELTON: No.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: No, no! I love Bob—

CAITLIN: Are you still in touch with him?

MELTON: Not very much, but—

CAITLIN: He’s in Florida now, right?

MELTON: Florida, that’s what I understand. We didn’t stay too much in touch when the whole thing fell apart.

CAITLIN: Yeah, when? Explain that.

MELTON: That was just because we all got—

CAITLIN: Then we can ask you some more questions to make you feel better. I’m sad that you’re just sitting here.

MELTON: Well, it fell apart mainly because the Boomers got older, and there wasn’t enough—the Boomers were changing—Dennis was becoming [inaudible].

CAITLIN: Needed a real job!

MELTON: Some of the other musicians were starting families. Yeah. All that stuff.

MELTON: Part of it, too—my perception is that a big part of it was that those who fell in love with doing this got burnt out after about four or five years of doing this. There was the restaurant tours. Even the people who enjoyed doing it—we were all so in love with this, but how much longer could you withstand it without taking it to another place, or making money at it?

CAITLIN: So what year do you think *Fine Times* ended?

MELTON: 1984?

CAITLIN: 1984?
MELTON: And it had—it ran its course, and when it begins to run its course, it makes less money. And I was the guy who was in charge from that, who was concerned about it because I was the one writing the check and all that kind of stuff, so I saw our revenues declining. The outdoor cabarets were going through the roof and had to be given to Electric Factory. The loops kept going. And it really became a matter of “Hey, we’re losing money. We’ve got to do something.” And I remember talking to my partners who was Bob Bowersox and Michael Stack and saying, “You know, we have to do something about this. We’re losing X numbers of money a month.”

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: And we’ve got to do it in this period of time, and Bob had an idea of making it more of a Rolling Stone kind of thing, and I was already starting to build the ad agency in the latter years of Fine Times. Things were changing, and I’d run into Dennis. He’s become an architect, and I’m like—Whoa! I’ve got to do something legit here. So I started building the ad agency while Fine Times was still going and thriving.

CAITLIN: So you would have something to fall back on.

MELTON: Yeah. And it was a logical thing anyway, and a lot of the staff stayed on for that. And there was just a point where something had to give, and we sold it.

CAITLIN: So who did you sell it to?

MELTON: We sold it to—

MELTON: Rob [inaudible]?

MELTON: No, we should have! We sold it to a newspaper company that did a lot of small newspaper type of things. And I forget who they were, but they had a lot of small newspapers, and they had a couple of big newspapers.

CAITLIN: Did you keep tabs on what it looked like after?

MELTON: In the contract, I was supposed, but they really took it on themselves. Like, right away didn’t want me to have a part in it. It was gone in less than a year, maybe six months. They ran it right out. I would pick it up and look at it and go “Oh my God!”

CAITLIN: “This is embarrassing!”

MELTON: It was! It was really embarrassing. I was glad that it disappeared. She mentioned Rob Martinelli, and that’s who I pictured it going to.

CAITLIN: Okay, who is he?

MELTON: That was a big mistake. Who it was sold to was a big mistake. That was my mistake. Rob Martinelli and his father had Delaware Today magazine.
CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

MELTON: And when Rob Martinelli came into the market and bought Delaware Today, it was at the height of Fine Times magazine, and Rob and I became friends. And at one point when he let his guard down and all that—no, it was after it was sold, and vanished. He told me later on “They don’t have to tell you, the only ante in the marketplace that scared me to death in terms of commentary was Fine Times magazine. And he said “Had you guys moved along—had you not gone in the Rolling Stone direction—had you moved along with your readership as they were getting older and their tastes were changing, you could have blown me off the map, because that’s the audience we wanted. Because we had a really older audience, and we wanted to capture the Baby Boomers so we could sustain a really long time, and we were really worried that you guys would start becoming a glossy magazine and cater to the tastes of the boomers, as they got older. But you didn’t. And then you sold it.” What really replaced it was Out and About.

CAITLIN: Yeah. And that’s still around today.

MELTON: That’s another direction that we could have gone in. I think that if any of the partners’ interests had been to stay in publishing—Bob Bowersox was like, “Okay, publishing’s my thing.” Or I was like, “Okay, publishing’s my thing.” Or Michael. We might have—one of the three of us—bought the other out and turned it into Out and About or into Delaware Today.

MELTON: Then another one that came out was Big Shout.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: Big Shout and Out and About were out at the same time, weren’t they?

MELTON: Yeah. Big Shout came out when we were still in existence, and they were around when Out and About started. But yeah, we should have sold it to them. But the main thing—and this is really to your point—it was all about those four years—or prior to that when there was the bands, before there was Fine Times—maybe we’re talking about an eight year period where it was just hot to be living in Wilmington or Greater Wilmington. So as somebody who made the wrong decision as to who it was sold to, I could really care less because in the grand scheme of things, the real fun, I was there. The real fun.

CAITLIN: Well, do you want to talk a little?

MELTON: You’re taking us up to about this time period, right?

CAITLIN: Yeah. Now I kind of want to back track to your album. What year did that come out?


CAITLIN: 1979. Where did that name come from? It was Living in the City.

MELTON: Oh, that came from a song that was by a friend of ours that we just loved playing. So it made sense that that would be the title track.
CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: Actually, that was a—actually, I’d almost forgot but the album was something I was very involved with. A good friend of mine and I produced the record, and he owned a small recording studio in Georgetown.

CAITLIN: I’ve seen his name pop up a lot. What—so, he owned a recording studio?

MELTON: He owned a small recording studio and he recorded a lot of local acts, and that’s what he was into—he was into the local stuff.

CAITLIN: Would he be someone I should talk to?

MELTON: Yeah!

CAITLIN: Is he still around?

MELTON: Let’s see—he’s in Virginia now.

CAITLIN: Okay. I’ll write that down.

MELTON: But he’s still around. He’s playing music and so he recorded it live in—what—three locations? At least two.

MELTON: Some of it at one of the precursors to the outdoor cabaret.

MELTON: Yeah, that’s right.

MELTON: There was an event at the Red Fox Inn on the property, which is not in Wilmington—which is one of the first outdoor concerts, which was sort of the model for the outdoor cabarets. And Bluesiville was recorded at coffee—I mean, Baucus, I think—at University of Delaware. It’s a coffee shop.

MELTON: And then the Cabaret Club in West Chester.

MELTON: It was all live. Not in the studio. I mean, we mixed it in the studio and actually you handled the album covers and the pressing of the records and all that stuff.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: But we really did that ourselves and financed it ourselves. Actually, a good friend of ours, Bill Rowlands who was a drummer that had worked with—actually we worked with him when we went to Berryville, so all of us kind of mixed together. Yeah, he put up four thousand dollars, he and his wife. And we did pay them back. We were fairly methodical about the bookkeeping for it and where we placed the records and getting the money for it.

CAITLIN: Yeah, how long did the whole process take?
MELTON: Oh gosh. Less than a year? I mean, a whole process of recording and—yeah, about a year because it was all recorded—done in '78 and released in '79.

CAITLIN: Okay. So you didn’t write any new songs for this album?

MELTON: “Willingtown” was an original song, and “More Money” was an original song.

MELTON: That’s right.

MELTON: And “Living in the City” was not a song we wrote, but it was an original song. Then there was the “Kong Song” which was written by a friend of ours. So we didn’t really—probably half of it were really not covers of songs that were very well known, so probably a lot of people thought that half the record was original. And we promoted it that way.

MELTON: We never did one hundred percent original. We would always say we would do one-third original.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

MELTON: And we would. About a third of our material where we played these venues was—sometimes we’d do songs written by the Watson Brothers.

CAITLIN: And would they do your songs?

MELTON: No.

CAITLIN: No?

MELTON: No, but there were a lot of exchanges of songs. I know Sin City Band has probably played everybody’s songs. Those guys have been some of the most embraced guys for playing other songs and stuff. And it’s interesting that Scott has that radio show and he works in Delaware, and he puts all of his music on there.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: We’d play—I mean, I remember playing—I played drums on one of his records.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

MELTON: And Wayne Watson played on it. So we did stuff like that. Dale and I played on Watson Brothers recordings such as they were. We did one little single, I think—local single. And a lot of it—yeah, about 45. So this was an LP. It’s interesting to me because—well, back then, it was an LP. And then everything went to CD, and now there’s a resurgence of LPs. We’ve just—some of that has been re-released as an LP in France.

CAITLIN: It says that on the website, right?
MELTON: Yeah, our LP—that ’79 LP—

CAITLIN: Are people still, like, contacting you—

MELTON: Well, it looks exactly the same except there’s a little blurb about the record company in France, but it looks exactly the same.

MELTON: Yeah, this small record company in France contacted us and they have reissued it. They’ve reissued the ’79 LP on vinyl, and they’re selling it mostly in Japan. They’re selling it in the States. They’re selling it in Europe.

CAITLIN: And do you get paid for it?

MELTON: We do, but not much.

CAITLIN: Not much.

MELTON: The music’s never been about the money. So they’re selling in the States, they’re selling it in Europe; they’re selling it in Japan. And that all started from this young man in Armin got on our website and said, “Hey, do you have any more of those LPs of yours? I don’t know if you know it, but they’re being traded all over the world. They’ve become a worldwide collector’s item.” And I’m going, “No? Haven’t heard about that. Tell me about that.” So he does. And subsequently, he was the catalyst to have this rediscovery of our record worldwide in an article in a magazine called *Wax Poetics*, which is based in Los Angeles, which is a forum worldwide for these people who are trading LPs. And we happened to fall into a niche of a certain style of music, recorded at a certain time, recorded in a certain fashion that a slice of people love it.

CAITLIN: That sounds great.

MELTON: So they’ve been trading these records of ours—the original ones—and he said, “Do you have any?” I don’t know! These things had been collecting dust in our basements all these years, and found them. Got the dust off of them and he says, “You should sell them.” Okay. How much? And he says, “Sell them for fifty dollars apiece. I said, “Wow, that seems like a lot.” “Shouldn’t sell it for less than that.” So we posted it on our website for sale, original LP—and we sold all twenty of them!

CAITLIN: That’s great!

MELTON: Everywhere! Australia. I mean, Sweden. You name it!

MELTON: Germany.

MELTON: All over the world we were selling these LPs. Pack them up, send them out.

CAITLIN: That’s hilarious.
MELTON: Then that created all this buzz, you know? Then it got down to where there were only twenty left, and I called Dale and said, “We’ve only got twenty of these left. Hold off on it.” So I told the guy, “That’s it.” And I posted that that was it. Shortly after that, once all the originals were sold and they were being traded, a few of them sold on eBay. One of them sold on eBay for $530.00.

CAITLIN: Whoa!

MELTON: Yeah! Crazy! We’re just like “What is going on here?” We didn’t get a nickel of that.

MELTON: We didn’t get a nickel of that.

CAITLIN: Of course.

MELTON: I got on eBay. I was trying to track him down e-mail-wise, and said, “What gives here?” He says to me, “I’m a collector. I collect your kinds of records all over the world. I’m [inaudible] these things. I’m just one of the guys in the know, and I just thought it would be the right time to throw it out there.” I said, “Did you think it would sell for that much?” He says, “Oh no. I thought it might go a little over 100.00 dollars and I’d think that was incredible.” He says, “I can’t believe it.”

CAITLIN: Wow.

MELTON: And another one sold for 300.00 and something, and then another one sold for 200.00 and something—and I don’t know how many others.

CAITLIN: Great! Yeah. How many are out there?

MELTON: How many have been sold on eBay or what’s happening there or anything, but there continues to be a buzz about it. We still get e-mails on the website occasionally. Here’s one example, and I don’t meant to go on and on about it—but this was a cool one. A guy from Sydney, Australia says, “The hottest DJ in Sydney, who actually goes live and plays vinyl and stuff and there’s lots of dancing and all that—and he also has an Internet show. He’s the man in Sydney, you know—he’s the man. He plays your Living in the City cut all the time”

CAITLIN: Awesome!

MELTON: “It’s something of an anthem here in Sydney!”

CAITLIN: That’s great!

MELTON: This was eight months ago! Crazy!

CAITLIN: That’s awesome! Have you tried contacting the DJ?

MELTON: No. No, and I’m not saying that a lot of this happens, but enough of this happens that it’s—this is going to be a big endeavor to follow up on it.
CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: It’s things like that, it’s other kinds of things. We could be making more out of this re-release—this re-issue—this fella in France.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

MELTON: But you start doing—if you begin to do that, it becomes a big project.

CAITLIN: Yeah, definitely.

MELTON: So we thought, “Okay, if we could find somebody who was interested in following up on all this stuff, we’d say go do it. And whatever could be made, take fifty percent.” Or whatever.

MELTON: And as we were saying, it’s all about the music. We would love for Dale and I and our current drummer and Alfie to go to Paris and play a gig because of this record thing in France. That’s really what we would love to get out of it, and if we could just break even to do it, that would be fabulous. So all of the money that’s coming in from this, which isn’t a lot—I mean, we do sell a bunch of records for 50.00 dollars—it’s all in an account, you know. We talked to Alfie about it. Let’s not divide this up. This is an account for us to go to Paris.

CAITLIN: The Paris account. That’s a good idea!

MELTON: The Paris account. And if we did go to Paris, we could play even maybe four concerts—make some cents out of it—but if we took the time to cultivate this, what probably happen—

CAITLIN: Is she up for it?

MELTON: Oh yeah, she is. We’re still going to do this; it’s just going to take some effort. Just because we’re signed on to a French record company doesn’t mean they’re clamoring to have us over there. So I mean, we’ll pursue that. There will be an opening for stepping in the mud, and it’ll pull us, just like things do.

CAITLIN: Well that’s great that you guys are still involved and still—

MELTON: Just a quick note. I know this is really about the ‘80s, but just a quick note about—in many ways, my brother and I feel like we’re doing the best music we’ve ever done right now.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I was going to say—that’s actually my last question. How has your music changed throughout the years? You say this is the best you’ve ever done.

MELTON: It’s the best it’s ever been. We really have found a way to do almost all concerts now, rather than playing bars and parties and things. We enjoyed the bars and the parties and things, but we really like doing this and really doing our own thing now—more than ever. We do partner up with Alfie and Aaron Dickens who’s one of the founding members of Transfer—and other
people, but we do the Melton Brothers. It’s my brother and I and the drummer and the horn player. Something like that. We’re doing our thing. In some ways, we’re not as distracted by other things. We’re focused on—

CAITLIN: Like architecture school and finding time—

MELTON: Right. Exactly. Having to make money with music—

MELTON: That’s the thing—when we decided we were not going to pursue making money out of music anymore. We’ve done a lot of parties and weddings. And I know that helped me through architecture school was the money we made.

MELTON: It helped me through *Fine Times*. I mean, there were times when I was toeing the line, you know? Oh, “I’ve got some gigs this weekend!”

MELTON: And we did focus on it for the money, and in many ways—in some ways it was fun, but in some ways it was a distraction from what we wanted to do, so now there’s no distractions from what we really want to do. And we’ve discovered some places that didn’t exist before. In some ways, the Turkshead Tavern that existed in West Chester years ago is very much the same as places like The Flash downtown, or the World Café Live and what we’ve got in Wilmington—and Chaplins in Spring City. Like, those little, intimate concert venues. There really hasn’t been much of that through the years, so just in the recent few years, those have popped up. And what I’ve been involved in is I helped create The Flash. You know, I saw that that was a possibility to create that, and I helped to create the Nixon Park Summer Concert Series—so it’s a little bit like creating venues, or the kinds of things we like to do.

So we do play at The Flash twice a year. Chaplins, that’s a wonderful place in Spring City. We play at the Queen Upstairs in Wilmington twice a year—we’re playing there April 14th. And Some Salon in Philly. And we just keep our eyes open for more places like that. But one of the best places we ever, ever played back in the day was the Main Point because that was a concert venue that—

CAITLIN: Where was that?


MELTON: But they would have some of the biggest names like Little Feat in music at that time would play there on their way up.

CAITLIN: Where did I hear—okay, someone I was just talking to today mentioned Little Feat. Do you remember the band from Newark—Snake Grinder—I just got off the phone with George Wolkind.

MELTON: Right.

CAITLIN: And he mentioned Little Feat.
MELTON: Yeah, Bruce Springsteen and people like that were playing this venue. I mean, it’s small. 120 seat place or something like that. And we would play there regularly. Not on big nights, but on a weekday night. We were regulars. It was one of our favorite places. They had a wonderful sound system, nice stage, lighting, food, set up. But that’s what The Flash is, that’s what The Queen Upstairs is. We’re playing the best places and the best venues than we ever have in our life. And the people that come out are the people that used to come out back in the day, and some new people, thank God!

CAITLIN: Yeah, that’s great!

MELTON: And we do a couple of the songs that we’ve always done, but we’re learning new things that we’ve never played before. And still, it’s not very many original songs. Probably the mix is about the same as it’s always been. But our approach—one of the big differences, I can say, is all in our own way—our own impression. We don’t try to imitate how the songs were done originally at all. Matter of a fact, we really do them our own way and they’re very different rhythmically, so if you were to hear us do a familiar song, it wouldn’t sound like that song.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MELTON: I mean, you’d recognize it. You’d say, “Oh, they’re doing Journey.” Yeah.

CAITLIN: Great. I know, it’s been great talking to you!

MELTON: It’s three o’clock and I have to go back to work.

CAITLIN: There you go! Oh, wait! One last thing. I saw on your website that you play with Larry Tucker.

MELTON: We’re going to.

CAITLIN: You’re going to.

MELTON: At The Flash next time.

MELTON: Because we used to play in another one of our reincarnations—it wasn’t the Velcro’s, it was the Larry Tucker Band—Dennis and I both played in a band with him years ago.

CAITLIN: Okay because I’ve been trying to contact him, too, because Bill Stephenson told me that he played a lot at the Stone [inaudible] and that I should talk to him.

MELTON: Yeah, he sat in with us a lot over the years. Great guy, great singer. We just thought, recently in this round of Spring Concerts that we’re doing, “Why don’t we ask Larry to do it?”

CAITLIN: Well put in a good word for me. I want to talk to Alfie and Larry.

MELTON: They’d love to talk to you!
CAITLIN: Excellent.

MELTON: I’m sure they would.

CAITLIN: Good. Yeah, so far I’ve talked to Jack of Diamonds, Phil Stephenson, Gary Cogdol, Jerry Grant, Sin City, The Hooters, Bert, Johnny Stansfand, George Christie—

MELTON: Wow, George Christie.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I’ve basically been looking at old issues of *Fine Times* and writing down the names and trying to find people and, yeah—

MELTON: That’s a big job.

CAITLIN: And also I’m doing the whole art part of it too. So this is just half of it.

MELTON: Wow.

CAITLIN: Yeah!

MELTON: You’ve got a big job.

CAITLIN: I know. That’s why the exhibition’s not until 2015.

MELTON: Oh, okay!

CAITLIN: So yeah. We’re trying to do dance and theatre. How they were all really intertwined at the time.

MELTON: Well, what you need to have for the exhibition is a cover of *Delaware Today* because it has all of that on the front. Dancers, and so on.

CAITLIN: Do you know what year that was around?

MELTON: No, but I could probably find that if you wanted.

CAITLIN: Great, I’ll send you an e-mail!

MELTON: I remember running across it at home recently.

CAITLIN: Oh, well that’s good! Well, thank you, guys!

MELTON: Thank you for inviting us!

*End of Audio*

*Duration: 86 minutes*