Transcript: Eddie Baranek Oral History Interview

Editorial notes are marked by square brackets.

KK: This is Kris Kniffen conducting an oral history interview with Eddie Baranek as part of the Detroit Music History 2015 Oral History Project on behalf of the Walter Reuther Library. It's December 1st, 2015. Thank you Eddie, for coming to speak with me.

EB: Thank you, Kris.

KK: So to get started, let's talk a little bit about your background. Where and when were you born?

EB: I was born in 1981, and up until I was about 20 years old I thought I was born in Detroit, on the East Side, at St. John's Hospital, at Seven Mile and Mac. And then when I was about 20, my mom told me "No, dude. You were born at Bon Secours, in Grosse Point." So this whole time I thought I was really a Detroiter from birth, but it was actually Grosse Point.

KK: That's... a good story (laughter). Alright, so where did you grow up?

EB: On the East Side, in St. Clair Shores. Um… East side, totally. Think 8 Mile, but not the 8 Mile that, you know, has become famous or anything, there was really no danger, but uh- yeah.

KK: Okay. Could you describe your kind of – neighborhood and community, a little bit?

EB: Suburbia, but old. Suburbia, older brick ranches, older post-WWII, that kind of a vibe, family setting. Sleepy.

KK: (laughter). Alright, and did that community change over the years at all?

EB: Um. Maybe. I mean there are, you know I would say there are… not so much changes, but there's actually a lot of artists and musicians that I've learned have come from the area.

KK: Oh, alright. Have you lived anywhere else?

EB: Yeah. I then moved to where 696 and I-75 meet, so sort of that Ferndale area, but now I live in Oak Park.

KK: Okay.

EB: Which I also learned has a ton of other musicians and artists and people right on my block.

KK: Nice. Okay, so did those – how did those different communities compare?

EB: God, I actually find similarit- yeah, they're actually similar. Like, um. Brick ranches in Oak Park. Lot of that post-war, lot of working class type vibe, type mentality. And I do think that that does play into sort of the reason why I may be sitting at this table today. Sort of like the working class ethic, I think, sort of is a thread that runs through… you could argue maybe the narrative of Rock and Roll, Detroit Rock and Roll, Detroit music, you know.

KK: Okay.

EB: Um. God, I'm going off track but who cares, right? –

KK: Oh, no, no you're not. You're…

EB: So, it's sort of like you know my dad owns a landscaping company, and if you look at my hands right now there's still dirt on them because I worked with my dad yesterday, in Grosse Point, and you know he cuts grass for a living and owns a company and he works seven days a week, and, you know, leads a couple crews of men, and it's weird but the metaphor that I have is that I lead a band of dudes… (laughter).

KK: Yeah!

EB: You know? And I have that same work ethic, and I didn't realize that he was instilling that – my parents were instilling that in me, as I was on this journey. So it's kind of strange. I guess you could say I moved from St Clair Shores to Oak Park, but it's really not… there's not that much difference, I guess.

KK: Right. Full circle.

EB: Yeah. Thank you.

KK: Okay, so… How did you first become involved with music?

EB: My… My mother was always playing Motown, Beatles, Stones. That's the stuff she grew up with, and then I have two older sisters, and they are the ones that really gave me that next step of education. You know, so I can remember the first time hearing Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody was with my older sister, or her explaining to me who Jimi Hendrix was. Um. Because I had sort of imagery in my own mind, against what these people actually looked like. Because when I hear the music it was like… No, this can't be real, you know. This can't be *human,* even. And so my older sisters are the ones that really sort of gave me… sort of a framework from which to go "this is good, this is not good, this is tasty," you know, and then it sort of… kind of snowballed from there, I guess.

KK: Was there any kind of particular incident or person that really go you interested in music?

EB: It's those two, it's my sisters. Um. You could, you know, my oldest sister Kim – she was five years older than me, so when she went away to U of M she would come home on the weekends and bring her acoustic guitar, and I would sneak into the basement, and I would play her guitar without her knowing. I would sit it on my lap and she would tell me… I remember, it was like probably the only time she was mean to me, even about this topic she was like "Go get your own… if you're going to do that." So I did do that, and… you know… in three or four months I surpassed her level, because she was studying at U of M and I was a 13 year old with no job, no girlfriend, no life. (laughter)

KK: What local bands or artists did you listen to when you were younger?

EB: Oh, God. You know that's – Motown is the obvious, easy one. And you know, I didn't really know who… I knew who Iggy Pop was, as a character… and so… I kind of argue it like this. Something happened in Detroit in the late 90s, you know, the thing I guess that I was the baby brother of, let's say. And – but something happened to me, personally, on that – in that situation, on the you know, the

smaller level, which was that I would love bands that were around, and I would go to see them, but they were all national bands from other cities, they were – I loved English bands, I loved 90s British bands. Oasis, like all these 90s British bands, and then something happened, and I started looking and listening to the stuff in our own backyard, here. And I went "Oh my God, wait a minute – this stuff, this stuff is like in color." I mean, this was – and then I was alive, and I pretty much discarded all the national bands I would go to see at these bigger venues, and you know I was 16 years old when this was happening, and I would go to these little clubs and bars, probably right down the street from where we are sitting right here, and just go "Oh my God!" You know, I was – it was a whole other level. Whole other world. It was in color, it was… My eyes were open.

KK: Okay, well. Playing right off of that, then, are there any like really, especially memorable concerts in the area that you've been to?

EB: Yeah. There was one… Okay, let's… Can I tell a tale? Okay, so, it was in the summer of '98, and I went and saw this band called The Porters, who were local, at the Magic Stick - the bowling alley, the Garden Bowl. A place where a lot of this stuff sort of incubated and came about. Where I say I had my real education. And there was a girl in the audience, and I was too scared to talk to her, but I saw her talking to this James Dean like guy… and I knew I could introduce myself to the guy but not the girl, so I introduced myself to this guy who became one of my good friends, Mike Williamson. He was a year older than me, he told me he had a band. So I go to see his band, which were made up of people my age, they were at the Old Miami down the street here on Cass, and on that bill was The Go, Murder City Wrecks, The Clone Defects, and oh my God if I don't remember – Oh, and The Metros, this kid's – the James Dean guy's band.

KK: Okay.

EB: And I go to the show, and then there I'm introduced to all these characters in Detroit that are now still doing things – a guy named Tim Vulgar [Timmy Vulgar, frontman of band Timmy's Organism], who recently played the Third Man Store [Third Man Records] opening last Friday [November 27, 2015], um… You know, a band called The Go, who were signed to Sub Pop (Sub Pop Records), which Jack White was in, a band called you know… blah blah.. Murder City Wrecks, okay blah blah blah… but I see this character named Tim Vulgar get on the stage, and the guy had foil wrapped around… I mean the guy didn't – he wasn't from here, you know, like from Earth. (laughter) He had foil wrapped around his legs, I remember he had a guitar that didn't work… and he didn't seem to care. (laughter). And somebody else like, threw another guitar at him, and then he played, and it was just like… I don't know if he *played,* it was just like this… it was performance art.

KK: Mm-hmm.

EB: And I'd never really been exposed to something like that. I mean, sure, I knew you could light yourself on fire. All the clichés, right. But this guy was just writing the rules as they were… he was just… he was using whatever was at his disposal, making it happen. And it... it shook me. It floored me. I mean I went "Oh my god…" And then that guy, that's the day I met him. We became friends. We're still friends. (laughter). And that was in 1998, so, sort of the world was- the flower was blossoming.

KK: Yeah, okay. Well then… what do you remember about the Detroit Music Scene through the decades? How has it changed?

EB: Yeah, that's a… that's a funny one. (laughter) Has it?

KK: Has it changed?

EB: It's just me that's changed! (laughter). I guess, you know, a thing I think about is like uh… context. So I came about when I was 16, 17, in 1998, this thing is sort of – I think I used the word incubating, and it's sort of you know, getting bigger and bigger, and then you have a band like the White Stripes who take it to that next level, around 2002, 2003. And sort of at the same time it's changing within all the bands just below it that grew up in the same scene as the White Stripes. That's – you know, the scene that I was a part of, and you know it would be… you were playing to each other and there was just forty to fifty people in the audience and it's just each other and each other's bands supporting each other, this one big family, sort of incestuous, you're all either in each other's bands, dating each other, those kinds of things… (laughter). Not me, of course, I was too young. But, you know, so then that- that little family, that little scene, started travelling and, you know… it started becoming a little bit bigger and bigger, and so you used to go see a band on Friday and Saturday, at the Gold Dollar down on Cass, or at the Old Miami, or at the Magic Stick on Woodward… that was called Friday and Saturday. But then things would change, at least within our scene, in that – the setting changed. So you would tour. And so this funny, weird thing happened where a lot of the bands from here, we all had the same booking agent.

KK: Okay.

EB: I – The Sights had him, The White Stripes had him, The Von Bondies had him, the Detroit Cobras *still* have him, um… the… I think The Go had him for awhile, and you know all these bands. And so you couldn't really hangout with each other in town anymore because everybody was gone, so you'd be hanging out with your friends in New York City, in L.A., but you know for me I'm seeing New York City for the first time, and then I'm hanging out with my buddy, who lives a mile away from me, but we're both in New York together. So there was one – If I can riff on that, there wa- we were in London, and we were

playing the Astoria, this beautiful old theatre, it was The Sights, the Detroit Cobras, and I remember it was my first time going to England, we were touring, and I turned on the TV and within twenty minutes a band called Electric Six were on the television in England, and I'm like "What the – I know that guy!" you know, and he's got an old lady sitting on his lap, and it was just so surreal, and then we were at a hotel bar and it's Electric Six, you know a band from Detroit, it's The Sights, us, and then The Detroit Cobras, and then Kings of Leon, a band who went on to do huge things, and another little band from New York called The Star Spangles, who looked like Detroit knock-offs, I'll be honest. And uh – we're all just in a hotel bar, partying, and this is like two thousand an- February of 03. So for me, I think, the change in that – like the setting would change. Things got bigger and like, you're not – you can't just go out and see each other anymore, everybody's gone, and so that's sort of a thing that changed. Um. How has it changed overall, though? Oh god. I don't know. The internet's here? (laughter). You want to go there?

[indecipherable]

KK: Alright. Did anyone in Detroit particularly inspire you when you when you were first starting out?

EB: Yeah. I mean, I go back to the characters. I can think of… a lot of these people, you know. It – I wonder. Most of these people, when I say their names it's not even their real names, it's just so strange to think about. But again, the guy I initially mentioned, Tim Vulgar, his real name is Tim Lampinen, but he still does stuff. I think the guy got a Kresge a couple years ago, I mean he's just… He's… you know, aesthetically interesting, visually – but, you know, he… he had a song where you just hit the guitar strings and you don't fret them with your left hand. You're just hitting random strings, and then he would just say things, and that's on a 7" record I own, and I remember going "Yeah – you can do anything," so that was inspiring. There was a guy – um, there's a guy named Johnny Hench, of the Henchmen, he's sort of I think of as my older brother, in a way, he had a lot of good energy. Um. You know, Jack White. When Jack White came out, it was – the presentation was great. The first album, songs are great, but the presentation was great. I mean for me, I just showed up with my guitar, in the shirt that I'd be wearing right here, and I'd wear it later on that day. But you know, Jack had things thought out. And for me, that was something I didn't think about. I just thought "Hey man, if you write a good song, it'll take care of itself." But you know, he had it too. Uh. A lady named Wendy Case – who actually I think went into the Master's program here at Wayne, props to Wendy. But, you know, there are all these characters that were already there, who had fully formed identities, because they were a little older than me, I was younger. I was a senior in high school, and these people were already at bars, they were drinking, and they were *adults*, right? The lure of the adult world.

Uh-huh.

And, uh. To me they were just… huge. They were huge. They were everything, they were my world, you know?

Alright.

There – there were more, but… whatever.

KK: (laughter) Fair enough. How about now? Is there anyone active right now that's still inspiring you?

EB: (laughter) Oh GOD. Uh… I don't know. (laughter)

KK: That's okay! (laughter)

EB: Oh – Oh, Okay, I'll go back. There's a guy named Greg Cartwright who um… When we think of Detroit, and what happened and this thing I was a part of, musically, there was a guy out of Memphis named Greg Cartwright, and he – there's sort of a conduit between Detroit and Memphis musically, like sort of in the Soul and R&B, and that world, but also in the Rock and Roll sense, in that we share the same sensibilities. We're really raw kind of energy- good energy, working class, those kinds of vibes, and this guy named Greg Cartwright writes these heartbreaking, beautiful songs that just... floor me. And recently you know he'll pair up and play Detroit, and I've got to play with him a few times, and for me that – that was just like oh my God. It was heaven. So sure, Greg Cartwright. I like Jenny Lewis, but she's L.A. and was in a band called Rilo Kiley. I like Fiona Apple, but you know that's probably not what people… you know, I'm inspired by a lot of the older stuff, from the 50s and 60s.

KK: Okay.

EB: People who are on their, honestly if they're not around they're on their last legs.

KK: Right, okay.

EB: Yeah. (laughter)

KK: When and where did you first perform a show in Detroit?

EB: My first Detroit show…

KK: Yes.

EB: … Was… A Sunday night in late August, it was August… I believe 29th of 1988, I know the year and the month. And it was the day before my first day of senior year of high school. I do remember this. And it was The Sights, my band, it was the Henchmen, a Cincinnati band called The Greenhorns, who were adopted as Detroit brothers, who two guys went on to become, uh, in a band the Raconteurs with Jack White, and Death Weather and stuff. And, uh, a band called – was it... the Fighting Pinheads. (laughter) Greg and Chris, good men. And it was the day before – it was in the Garden Bowl, on the floor, and a friend of mine, who became my bandmate, named Co, she would bartend on Sundays. And that's a little mini place in Detroit where the like-minded music people would congregate. We would bowl, drink, and hangout and talk about music, and just…

KK: Okay.

EB: You know, our shared interests. And that was my first show, and I remember Cogo asked me "Can you bring the PA system?" So… So the little 17 year old… We brought the PA system, and I remember when we were done playing, we packed up the PA system, and then all the other bands go "Oh hey wait, um, can we use your PA too? Uh, we didn't…" And you know, I'd only played four shows in my entire life, I didn't understand the concept of sharing equipment, you know. And uh, I remember that, and I was so proud that The Henchmen, and The Greenhor- that the guys, that the bands on that bill, used my PA system. And then I went to school that next day and I remember the mentality of like those first couple weeks of senior year there were like "Who are you going to take to homecoming? Are you going to go to the football game?" and I'm like "I don't know! I'm already like – I think I'm cool, hanging out on Woodward and Cass. You know, you've never been down there!" and they're asking me if I'm going to be shot, and I'm going "I don't even care!" (laughter) Older girls know my name! And… you know. It was awesome. That was a good experience.

KK: Sounds it, yeah. So – if not that one – what was the most memorable local show that you put on?

EB: Jeez. I… it… it… You know, it's hard. I think… I was thinking about stuff on the way down, and I was going… I don't know if I like, sort of… Uh, what's the word? If I – if the gigs are sort of clustered in my mind that way it's more like setting, like… the place on Cass Avenue I described, called the Golden Dollar, a place called the Garden Bowl, the Magic Stick, that's really where I grew up. So I think of those

rooms, when I drive by them I think of… I don't have the I think one particular moment in mind, it's just more of where I think overall I got my musical education, sort of just like, you know, I teach music at the School of Rock today. So I'll go in in a few hours and teach kids, and – what kind of education are they getting if I'm teaching them? (laughter) But it's sort of like, you know, they have the internet and they have me. I didn't really have the internet so much, I had more so just like… watching these people who were older than me, and I was trying to just play catch up. I was just trying to keep up. I was just trying to like – oh my god – you know I remember my first time we played Detroit in that gig I mentioned, and I remember doing a bunch of cover songs by bands, and I remember saying to my bandmate, my friend Mark, I go "Oh my – we've got to ditch these songs, we've got to figure out how to write songs!" We were writing songs, they were horrible, but at least we were writing, you know, so – so no, there's not one gig that sticks out in my mind. Just a bunch of them, I guess.

KK: Fair enough, yeah. Well seen as you just mentioned it, let's talk a little bit about the School of Rock and kind of what the purpose is, what you do there. What the history, maybe, of the school is.

EB: So, School of Rock, from my understanding started with a guy named Paul Green, out of his house in Philadelphia.

KK: Okay.

EB: And somewhere, I think, in the 90s. And he just was like, "Well screw it, I'm going to get a bunch of kids to play this music because they can." And if you've ever seen a doc – I've only seen bits of this man, I've never met him, but bits of a documentary where he looks *insane.* Like, why would parents trust this guy? So when you do see the film, in '03, with Jack Black it is *loosely* based upon that guy.

KK: Right.

EB: Um, Paul Green. So, it's funny you know, so what I do is I just tell kids that it's okay to be a little weird. That's basically what I argue, is like I've been there teaching, oh my God, six years, and (laughter) in Rochester, and I remember having a difficult time teaching in lovely Rochester because – for me I was like, "these kids don't get me, I come from – I'm so working class, and, and" – yeah right – "and – you know, they have all this money, and look at how nice their guitar is, and we're just opposite ends." And I felt more at home working at a School of Rock in St. Clair Shores. Because it was a city I'm from.

KK: Okay.

EB: And I remember saying this to somebody – and the person said "You idiot," you know, "The people in St. Clair Shores, they don't *need* you. *You're* more comfortable there, but you need to be in Rochester, where some of those kids maybe need you, they need to be shown that, you know, there's more than – well not to get too political, but there's more than Fox news" is maybe that - what they're shown at home. Yes, I am trashing an entire region, right now. So, anyway. So when I'm at the School of Rock I just show kids that you can do anything. Like, I love showing a 14 year old – they're like, "I can write a song?" It's like, yeah dude – or girl – dudette, whatever. Its like, "you can write a song, you can do whatever you want." And for me, I'm lucky. I've got to see the world. My realtor was Amy Gore, from the Gore Gore Girls. The guy who married us used to book the Magic Stick. I mean, I get to see the world for free, meet my wife, and most of my friends are through the fact that I play guitar. So, probably the reason I feel legitimized here today. You know, it's just kind of a crazy thing that, you know, when I was 13 and 14 sneaking into the basement for the guitar – who thought it would have, you know, landed this - in this manner. And so, to pull it all kind of around, we toured the U.S. and Europe with Jack Black and his band Tenacious D, and I remember saying to him – I thought I would have this – I've known Jack, we'd played shows together before, but I said to him, "Oh, Jack, I teach at the School of Rock and hey, you were in that movie too," and he's just like "Yeah, great, anyway – " He like doesn't care, it's just some movie he did, like – you know but for me it's… it's a lot of my life. Or for a kid that goes to the School of Rock, it is their lives. They identify as that. So I'm, I'm happy and proud to be a part of that.

KK: That sounds excellent, yeah. Alright. Uh. I kind of jumped around in my questions here, so just give me a second –

EB: Yeah, sorry. I'm probably jumping, too.

KK: No, no. It's all me. (laughter). Okay. You've travelled a lot, in your career, as you said, and you – you've met a lot of different people. Have you found that there's kind of a pattern to how outsiders perceive Detroit?

EB: Yeah. I mean, sure. And that's something IW as thinking about on the way in. Of course. This question does come up. There's a few different angles or ways to describe this. It's sort of like, when all this stuff started happening here, in Detroit, and then it was sort of taken out, and bands were touring – and this is like 2000, 2001, basically the first half of the – what you call them? The thousands? Two thousands?

KK: Sure.

EB: Whatever. The 05's? Anyway, it was interesting. You would go to New York or L.A., or say London, and these – you'd see this image of sort of this, the black leather jacket, and it would have a little NC5 or

Stooges button, you know Detroit bands from the 60s, and they were like *looking* Detroit. It was weird, like they – it was like they'd adopted this look, you know, and they thought you had to kind of be tough, and when you're done drinking your can of beer you like, throw the can, and we were just like "what?" Like, it was almost like… a caricature of like Detroit, because they – they wanted to be Detroit, but they didn't know what, like, gritty meant. Because a lot of these people in these bands were kind of like just kids with money who – they were just playacting. It was kind of weird. And you know, we were like laughing, you know. I'd be on tour with The Dirtbombs, another big Detroit band, and we – it'd be The Sights and the Dirtbombs, we did the U.S. together, and there'd always be like the one local opening band. And they thought they were having their moment, you know, playing with the Detroit bands. And here I am, trashing the opening bands – but they would just like try to adopt a certain Detroitness, you know – like what is that? That toughness, that energy – you know, which I think sometimes is a… fal- it's fake, it's a falic- I'm playing a role too, I'm, it's a part I'm playing, I think to a degree, even too. But it is real, you know? And… so to get back to your question, they think you're from Detroit so you must be tough and bad, and it's a badge of honor. For me, I'm just proud to be a part of the musical lineage. I hope that I'm a part of that lineage. I hope I'm a part of the legacy. I hope I'm just a thread inside the – you know, from Little Willy John to Fortune Records down the street, to Motown, Rational, Stooges, Alice Cooper – all that stuff, you know, into the Gories in the 80s, and then now – I just hope, you know, it'd be nice to have my little name in the history book as well. That's – that's a – you know what I mean? And so, yeah. (laughter) Was that – was that alright?

KK: Oh yeah! Alright. So now let's just talk about you more specifically. What kind of different musical skills do you have? You said you play guitar, you sing – do you do anything else?

EB: Yeah, you know it's – and I think it's true for a lot of people – it's like you'll – I started out on guitar, but – do you play?

KK: No (laughter)

EB: Okay, so. So I dabble in others. You know I can play drums, keys, guitar, bass, sing. Probably not well, but I can play all of these things, you know. And so – and I think it's true for so many people around here. And it's true at the School of Rock for the kids. They walk in wanting to learn how to play guitar, and then – part of my job is like yeah, but, if there's 8 guitar players in a room, and nobody knows how to play drums, if you also know how to play drums… you have a job. You have to learn how to adapt, you have to learn how to be – you know, multi, whatever, talented. And so – and in Detroit, I'd like to kind of throw it back to that for a minute. In the Detroit Garage Rock scene I grew up in – my favorite media tag – You know, you would find that Johnny Hench of The Henchmen was the keyboard player in the Henchmen, but then you would look the next night, he's the bass player in The Paybacks. Well that sort of thing would happen and be – it was per- it was throughout this entire Detroit scene. So I would be drumming in one band, playing guitar in another, and all that kind of stuff. So I love it all. I love to play it all.

KK: And are you self-taught across the board, or..?

EB: Yeah. I had six months of lessons with Jessie James, at the mom and pop shop down the street. Bless his soul, I have no idea where he is now, because – definitely not his real name, but it was Tuesdays, and then he would sneak me in for a free lesson on Saturdays. Because I think he knew I – I cared, you know? I like to think that.

KK: Alright, what was the most challenging or difficult thing you had to learn?

EB: Oh man. (laughter) You're probably thinking "To shut up, to be a little more articulate with your -" (laughter). "I have to transcribe this!" Um. You mean in life? (laughter).

KK: I was talking about instruments, more. But you know. Take it where you will.

EB: You know, being a guitar player and then in a context of, like, going to learn how to play the keys – a keyboard – is difficult because when it sits inside of a band or a group, you're playing and attacking… you're approaching your instrument differently. At least you should be. So in the beginning, when I was 16, I – I remember looking in the paper. My sister found this ad in the paper, and it was a Hammond organ for sale for $75 in Harper Woods. So we go to this old lady's house and we buy an organ. And – sound weird today – we buy an organ, and we take it into my parents' house, and my mother was like "What the hell-" It's like a big piece of furniture, you know, like a piano. She's like "You can't – what are you doing?" So I, uh, put the organ in my bedroom. So it's like my bed, my desk, my dresser, and my Hammond organ. And I just would teach myself how to play this keyboard, and I remember just being like "Oh my God-" the guitar seemed easy to me.

KK: Okay

EB: But, but – this thing, with the notes just right in front of me, I – I don't know how people did it. And it took me awhile. And, you know I think I always try to sell myself as one - "Oh yeah! I can play keys too" – and I have, but you know, it's still a challenge for me. And it's probably the instrument I play the most when I'm at home.

KK: Okay.

EB: And I have a 6 month old son and I put him in front of the piano and he loves it too. Of course he drools and bangs on it, but for me that's like heaven as a father (laughter)

KK: Adorable… Alright… So to talk about your band a little, are your bandmates all locals as well?

EB: Yes. Um. You know, I'm probably known in this community and actually throughout the world as – being in a band called The Sights. That was my band from 1998 until, oh my God, I don't know – what is today? 2015? Till about 2013, maybe? Maybe we played up unti – maybe. Did we play a show last year? I don't know. But now I'm in a band called The Scrappers, and I'm always doing other projects as well. And, uh. I told a tale earlier about being at the Old Miami in July of '98 and I – I met that James Dean looking character.

KK: Mmhmm.

EB: I remember meeting his drummer that day, and his drummer is my bass player today, in The Scrappers. So, you know some of these friendships I've made in 1998, a lot of them - what is it, 17 years later? – are still here. And that's something I think about a lot. There's sort of this net – or this network or web or whatever you want to call it, and that's kind of awesome. So, in the band I'm in today, the drummer is from Indiana, and the rest of us are from around here.

KK: Okay. And how did you meet the rest of them?

EB: Um…

KK: If you remember, if they've been around forever (laughter).

EB: Yeah. You know, Detroit – small town, kind of? WE have similar music tastes, so when people have similar music tastes, and they play music, and they play *out* – they play gigs out, publically – I think that's what happens, is these little kind of clusters. You know, and I'm – I'm kind of arguing this… almost in a pre-internet world? Like, when it came about for me in the late 90s. Did I..? I had an email address, but that's about – but that's about, you know, and you could look on websites, but it wasn't really an idea for a band that lived Woodbridge, over there, to have a website for your band. I mean, like big bands had websites.

KK: Right.

EB: But like, you know, we had an email address. And that's how you could reach the band. But – so I mean, we met each other – a lot of people met each other just being out. Out and about, at gigs, I guess.

KK: Right, okay. You mentioned it a few times, now, so I think we should talk about it a little bit. How has, like, the internet and technology changes affected your career?

EB: And – and yeah. Because I do bring it up because I feel like I was there kind of before and here now while it's still changing, I think. I don't think anything has ended, right? And so, um. You know, we would be on a smaller record label, The Sights were on a smaller record label in the beginning, and things would be scattered, so – sort of piecemeal. So you'd be on a label out of Los Angeles, and they would take care of the United States and Canada, and then you would be on a label – we were on a label out of London, and that would take care of Europe. And then you would be on another record label for Australia. But – but sort of, like, you know, the worlds wouldn't really talk.

KK: Oh, okay.

EB: I mean, it truly is – was – has now become the world wide web, right, and you know when I first started touring, we sold more CDs than we did LPs, so we sold more compact discs than vinyl records. You know, we'd lug our vinyl records in the hopes that people shared our old – old school mentality, whatever you want to call that – and then things change when you tour. So then 2003, 2005, 2006. And, you know, your band had to be on uh – MySpace. (laughter) And I remember – we were on a major label at the time, and I remember the guy – the reps for the major label would be like "Why don't you guys join MySpace?" and we were like "I don't know! I-" you know, I'm not on Facebook today, my bands are, but I can't – I don't even – I can barely function in this – I got enough problems, you know. And so – I remember that changing, though, and then we would sell more vinyl records on tour. And we sell less CDs, today.

KK: Mhmm, okay.

EB: Because it's a digital download with the LP, and/or you can go to – what is it? Soundcloud, Bandcamp, download it – so it's changed… it's changed sort of some of the things. The approach in how you release a record, so if you want to release a record it has to come with extremely nice packaging, so that people who want the tangible item have that beauty and the aesthetic beauty that surrounds the sound. It's not just putting on a record. So – so it has changed, for me. Some might say that – a friend of

mine called me the most conservative person he knew because I just don't like change. (laughter) There's so much truth in that. (laughter)

KK: Do you find that it's kind of changed the Detroit scene in general? Like – kind of the people you're reaching, maybe, through the internet? I don't know.

EB: Um. Man, that's a good question. It helped – you know, I know I'm not on like social media, but it helps me – I email people and that's how I stay in touch with people I've met on tour.

KK: Okay.

EB: Has it changed the Detroit music scene? Uh. When I first started and I got popular, let's say in 2000, 2002, it was again still this insular sort of group of people. And then the outside world discovered what was happening in the backyard. And then kind of just the – the – just, you know people were kind of into Rock and Roll, but maybe didn't go Downtow- come Downtown as much.

KK: Okay.

EB: And then they started coming downtown and that's 2003, 4, and 5 and 6. And then, then they started blogs. They would start blogs on the music scene, which I thought was always funny because… I always thought those blogs were funny. Yeah, there were two or three blogs that came out about the Detroit music scene. Um. I don't think it changed in any way the way that people play music, played music, or wrote music?

KK: Okay.

EB: I think that's pretty much been – Detroit's pretty guitar based, but then you know you have a laptop we're both looking at that it's like, well that did come about musically in Detroit. (laughter) And you know that did change some of the sound going on, sure. But that – I think that electronic part of music was always here in Detroit anyway, with the Techno.

KK: Right, okay.

EB: The Belleville Three, all those DJs and people that I'm not that –

KK: Did you find that technology changed the touring experience very much?

EB: Yeah. Of course. You know. I don't have to carry two atlases in the band van anymore, that was a big step. Because uh – there was always one guy in the band that had, you know, one of those really nice new phones that just came out, so you could – I mean the first days of touring, I can remember calling venues on payphones, going "We're lost, is it Jef- West Jefferson Avenue, or East Jefferson Avenue?" So things like, of that nature, um – I can remember touring in a van where we had CDs and cassettes to listen to, and then I remember a guy – I remember a guy coming into our van and going "Oh, you guys still carry around these items? You know, you could just listen to music on one little thing" and I'm like "I know, but you don't get it – like, I can't listen to this old 1950s R&B artist – they don't have that on the internet, yet."

KK: Mmhmm

EB: Like, we just prefer to listen to it, that's all. You know? I mean, that's just –

KK: Fair enough.

EB: So. Those are some changes that… (laughter)

KK: Alright, to talk about you, particularly, as an artist, how has your musical style changed over time?

EB: Oh, God. You want me to face – you want me to look in the mirror. (laughter) I've been trying to dodge this. Um. It's funny how little I… sometimes I feel like it has and it hasn't, so. I feel like it hasn't changed, to go against the question (laughter). I feel like it hasn't changed. Man, what a question. So. In the way I write, in the way I write… it hasn't changed in that I will cut lawns with my dad, and I'll take a few years off, and then I'll go back to it and I'll work a few days a week, and it's when I'm cutting lawns with my father – this is so bizarre, but it should make sense – that's when I can get inside my own head. So if I'm pushing a lawn mower, and it's in a mind numbing, like, sort of just *zone* in a state I'm free. And that's where things sort of pop into my head. So melodies, chord changes, sort of just like – broad ideas or lyrics, and things of that nature. And that's when I can get things done, because it's at the rest of my day that my facetime is sort of taken, you know, I have a son, I'm teaching music, you know I was with M. L. Liebler here at Wayne State teaching stuff for 7 years, so… when I'm cutting lawns with my dad, that hasn't changed. I've been cutting lawns since I started writing, and I still write that way. I was writing lyrics *yesterday* in that manner, so I was actually marvelling, I was going "Oh my God, I still do this?" So that hasn't changed. Um. Maybe the way I write the lyrics down has changed – with technology, so I write it in my IPhone, I used to still handwrite it up until about last year. (laughter) But I

finally succumbed – my wife said "get rid of all the paper in the house." But how has – you know I think I look to different – my influences have changed over the years, and I think another thing is I've slowed down. It's that classic you get older and you slow down. (laughter) And it sort of kind of has… gone into my music. And slowed down in the sense of, like, I just don't need to be playing so many notes. It's actually as simple as that. If I watch a video of me at age 17, I'm like "Oh my God, what was I -" But of course, so many people are trying to say that to their 17 year old self, if they could, they would say slow down, right? So, but I'd actually say that like – the idea of being in a band, and like having a group of people sit in a room and play live music – that sort of joy or passion hasn't changed since the first time I did that. Like, that's still the way I create, you know, I don't – you read a lot of interviews where people musically like, "Oh I collaborated on an album with somebody in London, England and then we bounced the files back to each other via email, back and forth" and it's… I'm going "Oh my god!" You know, I'm not knocking people that do that, I could just never do that, it just seems – as you know, I like to talk, and it's like, I want to share a cup of coffee on a break, and talk about it, and just, like, work through that. Again, I like just being in the room and doing it. So. I hope that's enough that you have, there.

KK: Oh yeah. Do you prefer recording or touring? And why?

EB: I love them both. And they have just so many great things, you know, you do find a lot of people that tire of touring. And – and I should too, at age 34, having done my first tour in – 2000, 15 years ago. And I don't tour as much, anymore, right? I think we get it. But there was a period where I was gone like 4 to 6 months out of a year for a few years, and that – so using like, my parents house as a storage facility was basically what I did in my 20s. And I enjoyed it, and I loved it, and I love touring, I love going to all the towns, I love seeing the world, I love – I *loved* it. Seriously loved it. And I still do. And then with recording, it's a different framework where mentally it's a different thing. You know, so. For recording I love trying new ideas that I never – scaring yourself, you know, you're trying something new, like, with touring it can become sort of monotonous and the same – it's Saturday night every night, you feel like Sunday morning every time you wake up, and then with recording it's like "Oh my gosh, there's a new palette." Sort of like every time you're uncovering another layer, "Oh my God, you know, I've said so much on that last song!" and "Oh my God, I'm going to say so little now…" and, you know, less is more now, and you constantly find new ways to – discovery about I think yourself, more than anything, so. I love them both.

KK: Fair enough, good reasons. This is a very broad one – do you have any other particularly prominent memories from your career that you'd like to share?

EB: Well I – I wrote down on a piece of paper, not my life milestones – um. I mean. What are – you know. I ask my students this all the time, what is the definition of success? You know, what does it mean to be successful? I guess – it's like, "Oh my God. Make me answer that? I don't even know what I'm going to do next year at college, kid!" So. I guess it's um… I'm going to, you know, rattle off a few accomplishments and go like… playing the Ryman Auditorium, at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, that

was a big – that was a great like "Oh my God, are you serious?" Playing Red Rocks in Colorado, and my name is on a little plaque in gold under a cave in their museum, which a student did tell me he saw and he took a picture of it for me – so it's "Oh my God, I did do something!" So there's like millions of those things, and it all started, though, like being a 16 year old kid, and you were like "God, if I could just play one show. If I could play out in public." Then it's like, "Oh man, if a girl would talk to me because I did that." And then it was like, you know, you want – slowly all your goals they keep changing, and they grow, and you keep growing, and you keep growing, and so finally it… you know, so what is success, right? You do all these things, and you meet all your heroes, and you're hanging out in these towns – weird towns, with these weird people, who then like later become your friends… (laughter) Um. Then I think that was pretty good. So I don't know if it's one specific moment. It's just – It's been awesome.

KK: Yeah, the whole collective experience.

EB: Yeah.

KK: Sounds incredible. So then kind of on the other side of things, what have been some problems that you've encountered in your career?

EB: (laughter) God. Let's see, what are the biggies. God, sex, religion… greed. (laughter). Problems… Greed, yeah. Greed. You know, when it was just the forty to fifty people in the dozen bands, God, wasn't it so great? Can't we go back to that? And nobody ever change? And uh, you know, so then greed does come into play. People get attention, people get jealous. Hey, I'm guilty of that too. And so you see the ugly side of humanity.

KK: Right

EB: You watch friendships kind of go away, you watch things change, people change, hell, I changed. I hope I changed. And, um. Those are the things that suck, right? I mean, I sort of idolized all these people and then as I got to know a lot of these people they became my friends or you go "Ah, I don't want to go down that path," so there's a lot of ugliness. There was a lot of drugs. Lot of drugs. Um. What else was there? What other problems? You know, I think sometimes I could be good at sabotaging my own self, and stab – like shooting myself in the foot, and botching it because I was probably comfortable with where I was. As my friend says, I don't like change. So it's like, you know, I could probably subconsciously sabotage my own gig just because I liked the level I was at, because I was a little scared at where it could go. And so if I look at myself today, and think "Well, I got married, have a kid, have a mortgage, and I'm pretty happy – I'm pretty happy." So to go back to the *problems* (laughter). I don't know – I'm so happy, I'm proud to be from Detroit, and if I can be a part of that lineage… You want the dirt, though, don't you? You want the dirt. I remember asking this question, on Wayne State campus, to

Duke Fakir, the last remaining Four Top, about three years ago, because I *know* the dirt stories of Motown – but I wanted to hear him give me dirt. (laughter). And no, he glossed over it and gave me the happy company slogan. And I was like, "But didn't Berry Gordy -" and then he just, he did not – he would not take the bait. Oh well. Oh well.

KK: Maybe it's the same story for him. Big picture, everything's good.

EB: I think so. There – you know, if I think of problems, I wronged – I screwed over… I've screwed over band members. I screwed over a guy, a record label in L.A. I still feel about- bad about that. My lawyer told me "Don't sign! Don't sign!" I followed his advice. Maybe to my benefit, that guy's detriment. I feel bad about that, yeah. Oh well.

KK: Fair enough. (laughter) What do you value most about what you do?

EB: Jeez. Maybe it's the allowance to get to be me. I get to just really kind of get to be me. Like, every day. Like I don't have to kind of now go put on a – God, I'm going to speak in a language that I don't even know what I'm talking about, so be prepared. I don't have to go to a corporate office. I don't even know what that is! I'll be honest, you know. I – I just hear stories from my friends, and people I know, and it's like I don't want that world. So I think I value the fact that I can just – I can kind of be myself. When I have – I'm thinking about a 17 year old student that I teach later today, and he's getting into this Detroit garage rock scene that he just discovered his guitar teacher – wait a minute, he's like reading about this stuff and he's like "Wait, why are – you were there?" "Yeah, I'm not just the guy you see at 7:30 on Tuesday night, alright, dude?" But I value that I can like, can share that with him. And then I can talk to his parent and be equally just me. You know the parents come see me play. I can just be myself, I don't have to sort of put on… I guess that's what I value.

KK: Fair enough. What do you think the future will be like for musicians like yourself?

EB: (laughter) Kids… I mean I do feel, you know. So I was at Wayne State doing – being in a learning community, and my role was as peer mentor. That was the title. Basically I sat in an English classroom with the poet professor M.L. Liebler from the English Department, for about – on and off for about… yeah, 7 years. And so I would get to see what – what, 17 to 21 year olds? How they think, and talk. Couple of 30 year olds, and stuff like that. And I would compare that against the people I taught at School of Rock, who are just younger as well. And so you'd – I'd have this younger pool, and then this older sea at Wayne State. And so the question was what do I think of the future of music..?

KK: What do you think the future will be like? Do you think there's going to be like new challenges or opportunities for them?

EB: Sure. Just like any generation has, but what are they?

KK: Yeah.

EB: So… So it's like, you know. The kids I teach at School of Rock, they play guitar still. It's really strange when they're – they're into bands that I was into when I was 13. That's the weird part for me. They're like into Grunge, and Seattle, and all that stuff. And I'm like "That's – that was around when I was a kid," and, and now I'm turning into that old elder like "Well when I was a boy..." you know, and I have to be careful, but I think the guitar won't die. Because I'm first hand, in the trenches, seeing it. It won't die. I see kids with the same excitement that I had, when they play guitar. Again, with the people in a room. Live music. Community. Social aspect, like we're trying to solve problems together. That's like "Oh my God!" To me that's like so awesome. Um, I think I get a little more scared when I was at the Wayne – in the classroom at Wayne State, in the context of seeing the youth of today, because I am an old man and traditional in so many ways, and I think was already that guy when I was 18 years old here at Wayne State. I loved the romantic notion of doing a research paper with 7 books on my mom and dad's kitchen table. For me that was like, well here – you're a library – (laughter). I got so excited at that, I loved going – coming here to this building. I loved coming to Purdy-Kresge and doing research. And then I would check it against what was at the DFT across the street. I loved being like "I could go to the DFT –" like it was just a whole new world to me, and… I'm not going to… you know, I wonder if the kids I went to school with when I was 18 were like that as well, and then if I think about them today in the classroom, when I was a peer mentor, I – I get a little freaked out on research papers. I'm not trying to say that they're a little more uh, Wikipedia-esque, but I get a little freaked out. But you still have what, an upper third, whatever you want to call that quarter of the class who's awesome. And then you have that middle pile where you're just like "Oh my God." Dude. I had a kid say to me that the Civil War was in 1959 and I was like "You have to understand context." Okay. Sorry. I'm ranting now.

KK: That's okay. Getting down to the end of the list here, I'm impressed.

EB: Wow.

KK: Yeah. In your book you talk about the differences between playing small shows versus big shows. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

EB: Yeah. And I think you hear a lot of artists and performers say that there's nothing different. I was reading a Rolling Stone interview yesterday, lead singer, frontwoman of the Alabama Shakes band. Uh, Brittany Howard, I think, is her name. I don't really know the band that well, I was just reading her article. And she said the exact same thing. She's just like "Oh my God, we're a club band," and I – the excitement of playing in a room of a couple of hundred, or at max like, you know – yeah, like two, three hundred, five hundred, It's amazing. Because we're having a shared experience together. We're having a shared moment together. And then you get to those thousands, you start talking thousands, and it just… it's just a sea of, it's just a sea of people, and the lights are more expensive, and so they're not more daunting and they don't make me more nervous, it's just – the separation is more clear, the separation is more apparent. The fishbowl aspect is – is so like that, when you're at that level, but when you're in that small club, it's kind of like, it's great, you know? I'm using the same bathroom they probably used. It's just…

KK: Right.

EB: We're sharing. And it's, there's something that can't be taken away, and I just hope – society and culture? Where is it all headed? I hope we all – I hope society we have those shared experiences still, in the future.

KK: Yeah. I think that's a pretty good note to end on.

EB: Awesome

KK: Unless you have anything else to add?

EB: I think – you got it. I don't want to give you – stay up all night transcribing.

KK: Alright, well thank you very much.

EB: Yeah!

KK: This was really informative.

EB: I hope I didn't – It wasn't just – yeah. I hope it was useful.

KK: Oh, absolutely.