The following is a catalog of a tape-recorded interview with 36-year old Lee Morgan, at my home at 1412 Madison Avenue, Oxford, Mississippi. The interview mainly concerns the music scene of the Oxford Square and parts of North Mississippi. Morgan also expounds upon the music business conducted in and around the Oxford Square, and the lifestyle of local musicians.

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-Lee Morgan (hereafter LM) was born in Grenada County, Mississippi.

-LM talks about recording studio near his home in rural Grenada County where he stood outside listening to Jackson Southernaires, a Jackson, Mississippi-based gospel group, c. 1980

-LM was first exposed to music via the church, as a child LM says he had bad taste in music and gives an example of the band KISS

-LM speaks about college years at Delta State University where he heard lots of blues music at country venues and juke joints; talks about the integration and variety of music genres in the college environment

-LM talks about his college experience and exposure to music:

“I lived in an apartment building that had 8 apartments in it and seven of those apartments were occupied by musicians and then there was me. And it just kind of continued like that for the rest of my life, I was always surrounded by musicians.”

-LM studied political science, says he never dreamed he’d be involved in music business

-LM started working as a bartender in Jackson, MS; ran George Street Grocery (started 1911) where John Lee Hooker, BB King and Stevie Ray Vaughn all played in the past; felt very connected to the history of the building and the music performed there

[ELAPSED TIME 5 MIN.]

-LM credits the documentary film “Last of the Mississippi Jukes” for his inspiration to work with George Street Grocery and preserve the music venue heritage of Mississippi;
was inspired by those non-musicians who worked (unsuccessfully) to save the Subway Lounge in Jackson, Mississippi

-LM started making music contacts all over the country at George Street Grocery, but concentrated on Mississippi musicians including L.C. Ulmer, Taylor Grocery Band, Afrissippi, Jimbo Mathus, etc.; also started hosting a blues night on Tuesdays

-LM began booking gigs for many bands that passed through the bar

-LM says Oxford residents don’t appreciate local musicians because they are so available and present, but Oxford musicians draw incredible crowds in other parts of the state

-LM says Oxford is the center of the Mississippi music scene, explains the local talent which includes world music, blues, bluegrass, alternative and hard --rock

-lists many local bands and tells about their styles: Color Revolt, Mayhem String Band, Taylor Grocery Band, Maria y El Sol, Blue Mountain, T Model Ford

[ELAPSED TIME 10 MIN.]

-Defines “Electric Catfish Music”: reply given by a Taylor Grocery Band member saying our music is “music you eat catfish to, except electric.” (the band started as an acoustic group that performed at Taylor Grocery catfish restaurant in Taylor, MS)

-LM says his days vary between sending press releases, negotiating venue prices, finding instruments for musicians, making contacts and doing business on the phone and on email; credits ability to successfully do his job to the extensive musician and venue contacts he’s garnered over the years

-Works for Afrissippi and L.C. Ulmer primarily, but also serves as the go-to guy for local musicians looking for work

-LM says each band and venue has varied requests—some bands are only looking for hotel room and a hot meal, others look for high paying gigs, but for the most part, people playing in Oxford just want to perform and aren’t concerned with excessive requests; explains the term “rider”

[ELAPSED TIME 17 MIN.]

-expounds upon how local musicians playing on the Oxford Square don’t get the crowds they should; says people appreciate the music, but feel they can see the acts “any time” He also credits the large number of music venues (bars) with live music such as Two Stick, Proud Larry’s, Jubilee, The Library, Parrish’s, Rib Cage, Taylor Grocery to creating more options so crowds aren’t as large as they may be in other towns
-LM says most venues have an eclectic line up of musical performances, no bar sticks to a specific genre such as a blues bar or a punk bar

-Explains his home environment: Justin Showah, Guelel Kumba, Jess ?, and LM all live above a recording studio. Doesn’t participate in most of the recordings downstairs. But says people are always around the house practicing and playing different music. Says several international music acts have recorded in the studio

“I hardly ever listen to a record because there is so much live music going on in my house.”

“We’ve had people from as far away as Finland and England and Germany record at the house, too. I guess because they want that Mississippi feel, I guess. I think it gives them credibility when they go back to Finland they can say, look, we are real blues men, we recorded in Mississippi. Good for a press release for those guys.”

-describes homemade nature of the recording studio in the basement. Sound booth built by Showay and Mathis

-Describes music community as incestuous, says that all performers in the Oxford scene play with several different bands because it is the only way to work as a musician without being on tour all the time. Names many musicians and bands which have rotating line-ups and styles Says most musicians hold day jobs. “I don’t know very many people that play in just one band.”

-LM says Oxford has several professional musicians, but they travel a good bit.

[ELAPSED TIME 23 MINUTES]

-describes his taste in music as blues, Americana, folk, singer-songwriter; talks about seeing Buddy Guy perform recently

-LM says his most memorable music experience in Oxford was a recent surprise Blue Mountain reunion, says Blue Mountain is a local favorite, whose members lived in Oxford for a long time. Says the band was on the cover of the second issue of “No Depression Magazine,” a widely read roots rock magazine.

-LM consumes music on the computer, ipod, listens to music in his house; sees music about six nights a week. Says he sees more live music than most people and that he probably listens to more live music than recorded music.

-LM says his opinion is that Mississippi, specifically north Mississippi, is the center of American music (with the exception of the African influence)
-LM says Oxford location can be credited for the music scene because of its proximity to the north Mississippi blues musicians of the hill country genre; Says hill country blues has more African traditional influence than the Delta blues

-Describes how Guelel Kumba, a Senagalese-born, Oxford-based musician, discovered 500 year old rhythms of traditional songs he learned in Senegal being performed as blues tunes in MS (only difference was the lyrics)

[ELAPSED TIME 29 MIN.]

-LM says his most effective promotion tactic is face to face interaction, but that email is also very productive manner of promoting a band—But there is never a way to know what kind of crowd will turn out for a band

-Explains how working with a specific venue, like he does for Two Stick, is more of a talent-buying vocation, one where he finds the talent and books them gigs at the bar. In these cases he doesn’t work as closely with promotion (mostly done via advertisements by bar or promotion by the band itself)

-LM says when school is in session, the most live music can be found on the Oxford Square; notes that football season usually brings the biggest crowds out for music; and on such weekends he considers bands with name recognition by Ole Miss fans as the primary acts to book. Also notes that bands with fraternity/sorority connections are good for football weekends.

-Says that the role of music in his life is one where “it sometimes pays my bills and it makes me happy.”

[Interview by Mary Margaret Miller is officially concluded. Tape turned off for approximately 30-45 seconds and then started again, when sound technician Kevin Dyess asks a few questions of LM]

[ELAPSED TIME 35 MIN.]

-LM describes popular national music acts like the White Stripes and the Black Keys who describe their music as a hill country sound. They cover songs written by North Mississippi’s own RL Burnside, also notes the success of the North Mississippi Allstars who won a Grammy for an album of covers by north MS bluesmen (RL Burnside, Junior Kimbrough)

-Recounts how Kinney Kimbrough, junior kimbrough’s son, says the hillcountry sound—a guitar player and a drummer—was born out of the fact that they couldn’t afford to pay a bass player, not because of a stroke of creativity.

[End of Interview, ELAPSED TIME 40 MINUTES]