

Ned Rorem interviewed by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich at Carnegie Hall on May 8, 1996.

Transcript of recorded interview: Ned Rorem interviewed by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich at Carnegie Hall on May 8, 1996.

Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich:

Is the level okay and everything? My hair, for instance...this is bad.

Ned Rorem:

The...first of all, those two essays on Carnegie Hall which nobody seems to have here.

ETZ:

Oh, we've found them.

NR:

You did?

ETZ:

The "I Lost My Virginity" one...

NR:

Let's see...any case, let's...me...okay...The "I Lost My Virginity" is here, so you can keep it, then. Then there's a statement made for a musical classical magazine which, if you don't have it, you should.

ETZ:

Mm-hmm.

NR:

What'll we do with it? Can someone xerox in this room?

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ETZ:

Yes.

NR:

Right this minute?

ETZ:

Well, I think probably...when...

Off-camera voice: [indiscernable] Do you have a xerox machine?

Other off-camera voice: Yes, right there on the round table.

OCV: On the round table?

OOCV: Yeah, right there on the side...

ETZ:

I think right there...is a xerox a machine...

NR:

Give me...[to off-camera person]: You don't need that, then, 'cause you've got it already.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

This is three pages.

ETZ:

Got two of those, I think...

NR:

Make just one for yourself and give that...make me three copies of that...and then as we go along, we'll see what else...does this run continually or do you change it out?

[break in tape]

ETZ:

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...photo of you and Virgil and Bill.

NR:

No.

ETZ:

Flanagan?

NR:

Uh, yeah.

ETZ:

Oh, good. And how about you and Ned...you and Lenny?

NR:

Yes, they're both in the book here, so they can be taken out.

ETZ:

Oh, great...OK

NR:

Can you...

ETZ:

I want to remember to...

NR:

Can you do that in a machine or in the camera?

ETZ:

We can do that. And how about you had one with Previn and Grafman?

NR:

I didn't have...feel like looking for it.

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ETZ:

OK.

NR:

It would have meant looking through two thousand other pictures.

ETZ:

Did you bring any of the pictures I took of you?

NR:

I couldn't f...don't know where they are either.

ETZ:

Oh.

NR:

They're in a great big box. Do you have any of them?

ETZ:

I have the negatives, but...

NR:

I wouldn't begin to know where to look, and I haven't had the time to shuffle through everything. Are you going to take a picture of this?

Cameraman:

Yeah, I'll take a picture of that.

ETZ:

Yeah, eventually we'll get...

NR:

OK, we'll do that.

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ETZ:

We'll get to it. Why don't you...

NR:

And then, the only time I played in Carnegie was the Judy Collins program.

ETZ:

Oh, that's nice. When was that, now?

NR:

It was December 3, 1988.

ETZ:

'88, OK.

NR:

I think it's the only time I ever played...I can't remember, but the...and then the scrapbook has the program the first time I was ever...

ETZ:

The very, very first time...

NR:

...involved with Carnegie...eek! [Sings] Da-da-lah-da...

ETZ:

It's either a horse coming up the stairs or it's...[laughs]...it's Robert.

Robert:

Is it a horse, or is it Robert? I'll have the croissants waiting here...Nick. It' my big break.

NR:

OK, that's there, and this is here.

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ETZ:

After...

NR:

You look familiar. Have we...do you know if...

Robert:

Do you want to try...

ETZ:

After, get...oh, definitely, that was the whole point.

NR:

This is the archive room, is that it?

ETZ:

Yeah, this is...

NR:

So.

ETZ:

These are the archives.

NR:

There must be more than this, though. Or this is all microfilm and stuff like that?

ETZ:

I don't know. It's all programs and whatever else they have. It's really something that's only been done for about ten years. So it's not quite as...

NR:

They must have...

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ETZ:

Thorough.

NR:

...have things from before that, too.

ETZ:

Well, they have things, but they've only had an archivist for about ten years. Now, much of the contemporary music had to do with the New York Philharmonic, and that's in the Philharmonic archives.

NR:

Ah, yeah.

ETZ:

So...

NR:

Is Robert the archivist?

ETZ:

No.

NR:

And what s...

ETZ:

Gino Francesconi's the archivist.

NR:

Gino? Is that...

ETZ:

Yeah.

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NR:

Is that her? Where? Her...

ETZ:

No, he's downstairs.

NR:

Oh.

ETZ:

Or he's not...

Off-camera voice: Yeah, he's not here.

NR:

Oh, and what's the...

[break in tape]

ETZ:

For the record, I'm Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. I hold the first Carnegie Hall Composer's Chair. Today is May the eighth, 1996, and I'm here in the Carnegie Hall archives today with my dear friend and colleague, composer Ned Rorem. Ned, you've been a fixture at Carnegie Hall for many, many years. And it's always stunning to me to see this kind of history that you've had here, and I think of you as such a young man that it's kind of amazing how far back many of these things go. I should say that in recent years, it seems to me that your reputation as one of our absolute finest, absolutely finest composers has just... Your reputation has grown and grown, and the new works like the new, the Fourth String Quartet I heard the other day, which is such a wonderful piece, is such an example of a flowering it seems to me that's taken place in the last twenty years. But I think what we ought to do is kind of go back to the...start at the beginning.

NR:

Okay.

ETZ:

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If you don't mind, if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and your background, if you would, 'cause we're all so different as American composers.

NR:

I was born in 1923 to an intelligent, middle-class, educated family, and I have one older sister. I was born in Indiana and moved to Chicago very early in my life - that is to say at the age of six months - where my father was a professor of economics at the university. So, both my sister and I were raised from the nursery school, age twenty months through the senior in high school, whereupon I left Chicago and went to Northwestern. And I was musical from the...very early in my life. Everything I am was pretty much by the age of fifteen, and...

ETZ:

That's an interesting comment. I think it's probably true in the arts more than anywhere else.

NR:

Well I knew very, very early what I wanted to do, and I considered myself very lucky because I think that most people don't know what they want to do...ever...including rich people. To become rich is not a goal, really, as I see it. But to be an artist, so called, is, sort of, the least neurotic of adventures, despite the reputation of artists in general as being crazy or being this and that. In fact, because they know what they want to do, and if they're appreciated for doing what they want to do, who can ask for more?

ETZ:

Mmm...I like that.

NR:

But the appreciation, especially in the 20th Century, is so evanescent. Artists - present company excluded, since you have the job with Carnegie Hall - on the whole, artists aren't paid salaries for being artists. They're paid for being something else. For knowing about their art or for their reputation, one can...like poets make a lot more money talking about poetry than writing poetry.

ETZ:

Do you think this has changed over the years of your consciousness?

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NR:

It's changed for the worse, definitely.

ETZ:

You mean it's harder for a composer, you think, to...

NR:

I think we're...

ETZ:

...to make a living as a composer today?

NR:

Yeah, I think we're at the lowest rung of the ladder ever, in the twenty...in the hundred years that art has been...Of course, we have to define what art is, but the...elitist art, which I think is a pretty good word and probably true, and so what? There's always been the art of the masses and the art of the elite, but today the elite is considered snobbish and superfluous and generally looked down its noses by the very, very prosperous pop art business. I'm not saying that we're better, or that one thing is better and the other is worse. But we as composers, you and I don't really exist at the ken of the general public. To ea... we're not even a despised pariah, because to despise something, that something has to exist. We don't exist.

ETZ:

Well.

NR:

Except to a teeny-weeny...and by "we," I mean composers of so-called contemporary classical music. This is a dumb definition, but it's the only one that will...

ETZ:

Yeah, I'd say...

NR:

...that people can vaguely know what you're talking about these days.

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ETZ:

It seems that it's also...there's a possibility within the world where it seems like all the rewards, the social and financial rewards are in the pop field. It does seem to me that it's possible to carve out a niche that doesn't reach the entire world, as in we are the world, which leaves us out but reaches a small corner of that world.

NR:

That's, that's fine.

ETZ:

I think the jazz public is a very devoted public, and I think there's a small but devoted public for contemporary music.

NR:

Of course there is, and why should it be more? Why does everybody have to like everything? The thing is that we are not a young composer...what...we are not part of the general fabric the way Bach was or the way Debussy even was.

ETZ:

Well, I don't know, I...Let's back up to Bach. He was part of the fabric, but he was also a teacher of Latin and an organist...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...and all kinds of other things as opp...besides being a composer. His musical...

NR:

But his music was played regularly every Sunday, the way all contemporary music at that time was, up until about a hundred years ago. Today, contemporary music, the music of mine and yours and our colleagues, is not the music that is understood to be part of the culture of our times, except by a small minority. Whether that's good or whether it's bad is a question of taste.

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ETZ:

Well, isn't there a trade-off involved?

NR:

You see, the trouble with today is that the either-or is between classical music that's at least a hundred years old and pop music. So it's...so the high-brow music's considered the Three Tenors, for example, or a concert of Beethoven symphonies. They didn't spend their lives steeping themselves in the music of the previous century, neither did they do it in the 19th Century. It all began, the business of contemporary music not being an urgent or even existing part - except in a teeny-weeny minority - it all began with the advent of management and big-time public performance.

ETZ:

Mm-hm. Oh, what I was thinking about when I used the word "trade-off" is that...or the phr...expression "trade-off," is that, on the other hand, we have the music of Bach and his contemporaries and people earlier than him and later than him, and that seems to me a treasure I would not want to give up, to be, like, the only game in town. Seems to me that Bach had to work very hard to explore his interest in other composers. I mean, there's this wonderful story about him walking miles and miles to hear...

NR:

Buxtehude, yeah.

ETZ:

...Buxtehude play, and his study of Vivaldi. But certainly our reverence for the past and the keeping alive the past traditions is something from which we benefit as well, it seems to me.

NR:

However, I was raised differently from most people. By a fluke, the first concert music I was exposed to was contemporary music, or the contemporary music of my early tens, which was...

ETZ:

Which was?

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NR:

Debussy and Ravel and John Alden Carpenter and Gershwin and Copland to some extent other American composers. And then by the time I was sixteen I knew everything Stravinsky had ever written, as well as other minor composers like Louis Gruenstein. I didn't know any Chopin. I didn't know any Tchaikovsky. It wasn't until I left high school and went to Northwestern and saw...and specialized in the music school and saw everybody pounding away on their Chopin etudes who had no idea of Stravinsky or Louis Gruenstein and I said "Gee, have I missed the boat, or have they?" I felt that, in a sense, my education was right and theirs was wrong. Though, just as with singers, especially in America, who learn to sing in every language but their own, badly. In their own they can't sing at all.

ETZ:

Yeah, I, yeah that's a very interesting point. Running back to the music that you were first acquainted with, how did you...how was this acquaintance made?

NR:

Because...

ETZ:

Through performance, or the radio, or...

NR:

My parents, as I say, were intelligent, a little bit left-wing, a lot left-wing, actually. They were Quakers, pacifists, and worked in the N-A-A-C-Pay, the NAACP, and the Society for the Advancement of Colored People. And they had a lot of "Negro friends" as the saying goes. And so when I was twelve years old, one of those friends, a protege of John Alden Carpenter, Margaret Bonds, who is dead now but has a reputation in black music circles as something of a barnstormer in the...in that she took spirituals and other things and made orchestral suites out of them. My first lesson with Margaret, and I still remember me, a little white...

ETZ:

Now, she was your piano teacher?

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NR:

Yes, my piano teacher. And I was a little white boy and I got on the streetcar to go to Wabash Avenue in South Chicago. And there was Margaret with her piano and she played me a lot of music that day. She played me some Ravel and Debussy...

ETZ:

At the piano?

NR:

Yes, and I...this is what music was all about. It wasn't the college songs that I had learned in grammar school to sing with the other kids. My parents were not...as I say, were cultivated, but they were not specifically musical. They were very lenient, so whatever Margaret, who was not a fool, thought was right was right, and from her I went on to other piano teachers, all female, by the way. There's no such thing as a male piano teacher in those days. It's always Mrs. So-and-so, and they gave you cookies when you left after your lesson. And if they were less informed than I was, I would say "I want to learn this and I want to learn that," and so I did. That's how people...With, the result is that now I still have more trouble at a concert accustoming myself to the nine-thousand seven-hundred fifty-second performance of a Beethoven symphony than to a first performance of yours or of Charles Wuornin's because you and Wuornin, and whether I like you or not, are bleeding the blood that I bleed. You are writing out of a certain necessity that I understand. This has nothing to do with quality. It has to do with...it's a sociological thing.

ETZ:

Do you think that probably that...I know that a lot of talk about role models today, and you mentioned something on a very simple level about a piano teacher, your first piano teacher who transcribed things and wrote things. I had, as a child, I had a trumpet teacher who used to write etudes for his students. And these were all very modest things and little two-part inventions, and it seems to me that that's a wonderful kind of role model - pardon the expression - for a young musician, you know, that people make music. They write it, they transcribe it, they...

NR:

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Well, Margaret was not necessarily a role model. I liked what she liked rather than liking what she was. And I never had a composer who was a role model, except dead composers, Ravel and Debussy mainly.

ETZ:

When did you start writing things?

NR:

I still remember. I wrote a pice called "The Glass Cloud"... and Margaret said...

ETZ:

How old were you?

NR:

Let's say ten.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

And I made up a lot of little pieces before that like , "The Farmers" or something or other, and I gave them very imagistic titles like the Debussy preludes, and Margaret said, "I won't really take this seriously until you can write it down. I will now write down "The Glass Cloud" for you," which she did from dictation as I played it. And after that I felt terribly guilty, so I learned to notate, and I learned to notate by looking at how other people did it on published music, which is, in a sense, still my model. I also remember that I took "The Glass Cloud" and and something called "The Fountain and the Stars" - I blush as I say this

-

[ETZ laughs]

NR:

[pointing to camera]: Is this in color? And went to Lionel Healey's and recorded this stuff, mostly improvising, and sent this...

ETZ:

What was the recording mechanism? This would have been in the thirties, then, huh?

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NR:

Yes, it was in the late thirties, and I sent it to John Alden Carpenter who lived in Chicago, he of "Skyscrapers" fame, and who did two ballets at least for the DeBasil company, as far as I know, maybe even the Diaghilev company as an American. I might be wrong... anyway for a major ballet company in those days, "Skyscrapers" and "Adventures in a Perambulator." And he wrote back. I wish I still had the two letters I had. I treasured them. His...

ETZ:

What did you send him? Was this a disk?

NR:

I sent him a record, and he said, "Well, learn to write it down, and then when you sell it and make a lot of money as you say you are going to..."

ETZ:

Oh, you...[Laughs]

NR:

Please split the results with your teacher, Margaret Bonds, who's a terrific pianist.

ETZ:

It would be lovely to have a copy of that letter...

NR:

Yeah, and then I wrote him again, and he sent me another letter with his engraved stationery of a modest red on grey paper on Sheridan Road in Chicago.

ETZ:

It's...I'm getting a different image here. I hear the son of Quakers, intellectuals, sort of left leaning, who is now going to make a fortune writing music. Is this, is this what you thought?

NR:

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My parents were not left leaning in the sense of political. They were not political people. They were left in the sense that they wanted equality of the races and of mankind and so forth, which I...I'm not a bit political myself. I'm...

ETZ:

Were they political or just, just...?

NR:

They voted...

ETZ:

...Idealistic?

NR:

Mother voted for Norman Thomas, who was a socialist, and Father voted for Democrats. But they weren't s... they weren't political in any sense of...they were not... flag-waving is hardly the word. They weren't...Mother hated the American flag, and I said, "Well, look, it's your flag, too," but she hated it for the people who draped themselves in the flag so as to impose their own Ku-Klux-Klanish notions. But beyond that, which is fairly obvious, she, they, were not political. They certainly weren't communist in the sense of sharing the money...

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

...and besides, the letter I wrote to Carter was just juvenile claptrap.

ETZ:

[laughing] Okay...

NR:

I would like to make a lot of money, and I would like...but the only way you can do that is by conceding in some way or another, and I'm just...I'm not against conceding, but I never...I could...I've done a lot of things but I'm not a whore. I wish I were, and I can name

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two or three dear friends who are...[ETZ chuckles]...in the sense that that they get on bandwagons and do the kind of music that's being done at the moment.

ET: The flavor of the month, yeah...

NR:

And I think it's great, and I think...and I'm a little wistful about other people who can do it. But I think I am...bec...in no noble way, but I can't write music that doesn't appeal to me. I can't write twelve-tone music. I've done a little of it. I can't write serial music, which I...I'm almost morally against it. We can talk about that after awhile if you want.

ETZ:

Okay.

NR:

Now, as a child, I was...so I was...I knew what I was. I was a very early alcoholic and drank to the point...

ETZ:

As a teenager, you mean?

NR:

Yeah, until age forty-three, and I stopped, or I'd be dead today. I was homosexual from the moment that I knew anything about the sexes, and I never suffered from it the way that everybody else says they did. I suffered, I suffered more from being a composer as an outcast...

ETZ:

Yeah...

NR:

...than from being gay. It's only in the past ten years that I've aligned myself to gay activism when they asked me to, because I think it's important. But before that, I found it... I didn't know what all the fuss was about. And now when I see young people, especially in the age go AIDS, if Paris is worth a Mass, as Henry IV said as he converted to Catholicism, so is the really unimportant issue of homosexuality. It's important only politically, 'cause homosexuals are just as ordinary and dumb as heterosexuals, but

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insofar as they're treated as pariahs, somebody must...I was also an atheist and I still am, and I'm...it's nothing I'm proud of. It's something that has to do with...I don't...can't conceive...I can conceive objectively the need for God, but I can't conceive objectively or logically of the fact of God.

ETZ:

And yet you write very beautiful choral music on religious themes.

NR:

Yeah. It's interesting that in my huge musical out...what's the word? Oeuvre...

ETZ:

Oeuvre...

NR:

...about half that is choral, and about half the choral music is, in turn, what they call "sacred" in the racket. I believe in belief, and in the name of the Lord a great deal of beautiful poetry and prose has been...has come to be including by William Penn, who founder...founded...one of the founders of Quake...one of the establishers of Quakerism, wrote a great deal of prose that I've set to music, but also King David, the singers in the Bible, and many others. There's a lot of lousy literature in the name of the Lord, of course, but there's also a lot of good literature, and insofar as that is part of the Mass or whatever church that may commission me or you, why not? It's as kosher an outlet as the concert hall.

ETZ:

Mmm...Ned, let's reel back a little bit to your schooling.

NR:

Ok...

ETZ:

You went to Northwestern? And...

NR:

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Yeah, at North - before I went to Northwestern, I wasn't such a hot student in high school. but it was a progressive high school founded by the Hutchins...

ETZ:

Oh, really?

NR:

By Hutchins and, what's the other man's name..?

ETZ:

Adler?

NR:

Adler. Adler's still alive someplace.

ETZ:

I didn't know that.

NR:

And they founded the great...in Aspen...

ETZ:

These are Hutchins and Adler of University of Chicago.

NR:

Yes, and that went down to kids one year old, which was me and my sister, and the Great Books thing was established in those early years, when I was, in the thirties, when I was in high school and nursery school. Then at the age of sixteen, I graduated - not because I was smart, it just happened that way - and went to Northwestern and studied with all these performing musicians who were okay, but not...no big deal, but it was fun to be with them. Interesting...

ETZ:

Did you make any friendships that have lasted?

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NR:

I sort of did. Ralph Meeker, the movie star later, was at Northwestern. And other people, less famous, were at the school. I wish I could see some of them now, but I don't know where they are.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm...

NR:

But I was at Northwestern three weeks or a month ago with Angelina Raya, our soprano friend, and during a stroll between rehearsals, I went to 1942 Orrington Street where I roomed off-campus in this house, just a house. And there were two boys sitting on the front porch with long hair and one earring and stuff, but I nevertheless said, "Hi, is this still a rooming house? And they said, "Yes..." rather suspiciously. And I said, "I used to live in that room..."

ETZ:

La plus ça change...

NR:

...and they said, "Do you want to come up and see it?" And I said, "No, I'll come in fifty-four years again..." But there it was, and it was just as when I go back to the utterly unchanged streets of Chicago where I went to school...in the South Side, which is now a big ghetto, except for the immediate University section, which still has a touch of class. I shed a tear for about three minutes, and then I get bored. I look...look at the apartment house where we lived during my really formative years, and the fence behind it. It's still like a suburb, almost. And the fence behind it between me and where Gene Edwards lived next door still has a sag in it where I used to jump on the fence to go over to play with Gene.

ETZ:

Mmm.

NR:

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Absolutely, I can still remember the physical feeling of jumping over. At Northwestern, I stayed for two and a half years. The draft was on. I got out of the army...

ETZ:

This would have been...

NR:

From 1940 to 1943, and I told the Arm...I got...I went into a class called 4E, which is conscientious objection. Then I said, I don't want to be 4E. I object to war, all war, but not at the expense of stopping my life and not being a musician. So I reapplied and was nearsighted and flat feet and various other things, and then Father took a bunch of my notebooks and went to Curtis in Philadelphia, and showed them to Curtis, and they accepted me in mid-semester on a scholarship. So I lived away from home.

ETZ:

Now, did you study with Scalerò?

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Then at Curtis?

NR:

And the thing I got out of Curtis, because I was nineteen by now...I knew a thing or two about counterpoint, and Scalerò gave everybody counterpoint and more counterpoint and more counterpoint. He had, ten years earlier, given Menotti and Barber, who were his two prize pupils, a very good education. But they were a lot younger than I was at the time, and I didn't like Scalerò. He was a fascist bastard.

ETZ:

Really?

NR:

Plus, I think...

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ETZ:

Literally, you mean?

NR:

Well, he wa...yes, he was fascist in the sense that he said, "I will not allow you to compose original music. You've got to write all these counterpoint lessons 'til they come out of your ears." And the other six students, all male, never became buddies of mine because I somehow didn't approve of this post-Brahmsian style they were all...

ETZ:

Was Lukas [Foss] there when you were there?

NR:

No, he had already been there.

ETZ:

He had already been.

NR:

Yeah, and Lee Hoiby and Stanley Hollingsworth were to come later. So there wasn't any composer of any note as an undergraduate. I stayed there for a year. I made intimate friends who are friends of mine today, still, all in the performing department.

ETZ:

And who, for instance?

NR:

Well, Eugene Istomen, for example, is a major, to me, pianist, and he was more – he was more influential, although he was two years younger than me on, certainly on my way of playing the piano and, by extension, of composing. How to make a sound with the fourth finger. He had a sound that I've never heard ever before, of melt- [break in tape]

ETZ:

This one?

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NR:

That's fairly...

ETZ:

Or this one?

NR:

They're both saintly.

ETZ:

Oh, saintly.

NR:

The trouble with you is your lack of diabolicism. [ETZ laughs] Where were we?

ETZ:

Oh my...

NR:

You, yeah, the friends.

ETZ:

Someone once said to me, "You look too wholesome to be a composer."

NR:

Did someone say that to you?

ETZ:

Yeah, and I found myself making an argument: "Gee, I'm not really so wholesome after all." I said, "This is ridiculous! It's OK to be wholesome!"

NR:

That's, yeah...Never assume the other person's right and you're wrong. [ETZ laughs].
They're always wrong!

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ETZ:

Ned, can we go forward a little bit. So you made some very good friends at Curtis, but...

NR:

I can finish my whole life in another five minutes.

ETZ:

Well, please don't do that!

NR:

Ah, from Curtis, I left in mid-stream. I came to New York.

ETZ:

Were there any other people that we, you know, might mention you were close to at Curtis? Like [Eugene] Istomin?

NR:

For example, I met a girl, Shirley Rhodes, who's now married to George Perle, but I don't want to get into that because...for various reasons - although this is private archives. So Shirley, who...I stayed in the house with her and her mother, who just died at the age of 102, by the way, her mother...

ETZ:

Ooh, really?

NR:

...and she became, I would say, sort of my best female friend for fifty years. We are not close any longer, I'm sorry to say, for various reasons.

ETZ:

Was Bernstein around then?

NR:

He had already graduated.

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ETZ:

He had already gone...

NR:

But once in '43, and I was there-there literally all of '43, from January through December because, as I say, the war was on, and I went in mid-mid-term, so they made exceptions all over the place. Shirley said, "When you go to New York to get drunk next time, and to hear...and to go to Carnegie Hall," which we'll get into after a while, "Look up Lenny Bernstein." So I didn't know you were supposed to phone people. I just knocked on his door, and he said, "Well, hi." And he was rehearsing with David Oppenheim, the clarinetist, but he knew a good thing when he saw it, and he said, "Come in and stay 'til we're through rehearsing." And we became very good friends. It was about six months before he had his overnight coup...

ETZ:

Yes, when he...

NR:

Substituting for Bruno Walther...

ETZ:

Mitropoulos, Bruno Walther, yes...

NR:

Bruno Walther, and interestingly, people always say later, "Isn't it nice Lenny hasn't changed since he's become world-famous?" It's because he was always incredibly conceited and self-assured [ETZ laughs] so, of course he didn't change. He knew he was the greatest. And a very decent person in retrospect despite the fact that was impossibly difficult all of his life. But thinking back now, and I have no complaints, 'cause he played a lot of my music.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm. I thought he was really an extraordinary...

NR:

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Did you know him?

ETZ:

Yes, I knew him. I actually played with him for a while - once for him.

NR:

In an orchestra?

ETZ:

Yeah, and it was a stunning experience. He was electrifying as a conductor. And he was working up to playing a piece of mine, and...

NR:

And then died.

ETZ:

Yeah, but...

NR:

Well, he would have...

ETZ:

Yes, he always said...He knew some of my music, and he said wonderful things about it. But the thing about him was that, to me, was that he really was a complete musician...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...in a way that is very, very rare.

NR:

So that when people say, "Isn't it too bad that Lenny spread himself so thin." If he had not spread himself thin, he wouldn't have been Lenny.

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ETZ:

I quite agree.

NR:

And he was pretty good at all of the things that he did.

ETZ:

Uh-huh.

NR:

More, and the jack-of-all-trades is standard fare for Europe, it always was. It's we Americans who are such, so pious about general culture rather than specific culture.

ETZ:

Uh-huh. Ned, you wrote a, a charming little essay that begins, "I lost my virginity in Carnegie Hall many times, and found it too..."

NR:

Yeah...

ETZ:

You want to speak about that for a minute, because i have found the old programs of Schnabel that you came down from Philadelphia to hear...

NR:

Came up from Philadelphia to hear.

ETZ:

Or, came up from Philadelphia to hear.

NR:

I think that the first time I was ever in Carnegie Hall would have been for the Schnabel complete Beethoven series, whatever month they were in 1943. Am I right?

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ETZ:

Here we go.

NR:

I went to...the New Friends of Music was later in Town Hall. So, well it was '43 and then '44, by which time I was living in New York. So I was here on that day, whenever it was, March 20th at 8:45.

ETZ How...what was that like?

NR:

I had already heard Schnabel in Chicago several times on a series called The Adult Education Concert Series. And, as a family we subscribed to it, so heard every year five of the major pianists at the time. We also had a season subscription to the New York orchestra, which was [under] Frank Stock in those days, who, in 1940 interestingly, commissioned everybody still living, in 1940, for their fiftieth anniversary. And fifty years later, they did it again. I wrote a big piece for 'em. It never occurred to me in 1940...

ETZ:

That you would be...

NR:

That fifty years later I would be, I would be one...I would be like Milhaud or Stravinsky Symphony in C, or the Chavez Concerto for Four Horns, all of those pieces, when I sixteen, seventeen, I was raised with. So Schnabel played, and he was a sloppy, but conscientious and inspired German genius, and also a composer, as I guess you know.

ETZ:

Yes, I do. How would you compare his playing in these concerts, as opposed to the recordings that he made of the...

NR:

I don't know if I've ever listened to the recordings. They were the same thing.

ETZ:

Yeah, I just wondered.

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NR:

I guess...

ETZ:

Fine. It's interesting. I see that, that Robert Shaw was conducting the Collegiate Chorale.

NR:

As early as 19... Well, and I heard these all the time and still in the 40s he commissioned Hindemith to do "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." But I don't think, for some reason, he did it in Carnegie Hall. Did he...Is this Carnegie Hall?

ETZ:

Town Hall.

OCV: It was Town Hall.

ETZ:

Yeah. There's another br...Every one of these things has a bra or corset ad.

NR:

"The bra for bosom beauty, Flex-Air." "Speak Spanish."

ETZ:

Oh!

NR:

All these people come back to me.

ETZ:

Rudolph...

NR:

Serkin was teaching, though not yet the head of Curtis at that time. Here's more of the Beethoven cycles.

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ETZ:

I know Edward Kilenyi.

NR:

Sure.

ETZ:

In fact, I still know him. He's still alive. He taught at Florida State. Matter of fact, I took his class in the Beethoven piano sonatas. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

NR:

Are these all the programs for Carnegie?

ETZ:

Yes, this is...this is everything from the...

NR:

'Cause I brought...

ETZ:

1943-44 season.

NR:

Oh, I brought it, up to the 1949 season...

ETZ:

Okay.

NR:

Where I first came...

ETZ:

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'Scuse, 'scuse me, Nick. I just...We ought to jump ahead to...[to NR] Although I think we...I ought to allow you to at least say what it is you meant about losing your virginity at Carnegie Hall, and...

NR:

Well, it means, what's, what does virginity mean? It means that you...it means losing your innocence, I suppose. And so it can be a metaphor for anything, and I heard so many...It means doing something for the first time, so I heard the Beethoven cycle for the first time, and I heard all, except for what I had heard in Chicago. I heard a great deal of this and that for the first time, and also in the company of my peers. Curtis was a lot more sophisticated in spite of the fact that there were little twelve-year-olds playing rings around Horowitz, technically. I felt much more in the swing of things at Curtis, although a little ostracized because I was a composer and because my friends sort of pooh-poohed Scalero, and I did, too?

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

When I came to New York on those various visits in 1943, I met Lenny, and Lenny gave me a...called up Aaron Copland, said, "I'm gonna send Ned Rorem over to you. You'll love him." So I went over to see Copland for the first time in '43 and played my little dumb pieces for him. And then I went to see Virgil Thomson, and Virgil said to me...I had already seen him on a stage during a panel a few years earlier and was very impressed. He was with three others, Lehman Engel and Cecil Smith and a woman, I've forgotten who, and maybe another person. And I found him...on one of those endless things like, "What is the meaning of music?" ands forth. And then everyone said, "Well, music soothes the savage breast" and quoted Shakespeare. And Virgil said, "How wrong they all are. Music is what musicians do. It's as simple as that." And it seemed like such a professional notion for... instead of wallowing around in sentimental gook. You learned to write music the way Bach did, and then you write it. It's either good or it isn't.

ETZ:

I like his definition of American music, too.

NR:

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Yes, the same thing...

ETZ:

It's music written by Americans.

NR:

Mmm-hmm. Then Virgil said, "Are you a good copyist?" And I said, Yes. And he said, "Show me some." So I sent him some. Then he gave me a piece of his to copy, and I sent it - for solo flute - and I sent it back to New York. Then he said, "If you want to be my regular copyist, you'll have to move to New York." So, without telling my mother and father, I left Curtis, this illustrious scholarship school and went to New York, and they were mad as hell. They were upset, rather, but I learned. And Virgil...I give...I copied his music with mixed feelings, but he gave me orchestration lessons, and I also, as I copied...

ETZ:

Did he pay you?

NR:

He paid me twenty dollars a week.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm...

NR:

Of which, five dollars went to beer to get drunk with. Ten dollars went to Morris Golde, with whom I was living, to pay the rent, and five dollars I put in the bank. And both my father and Virgil were impressed with the bank part of it.

ETZ:

That's very impressive.

NR:

I am too, in retrospect.

ETZ:

This was what year?

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NR:

1944.

ETZ:

'44, '44-'45?

NR:

I lived with Morris, who's still a very good friend.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

You know Morris.

ETZ:

Sure.

NR:

Then, I can remember everything Virgil ever said, and I was copying, he would be running the world, as a critic of the Herald-Tribune from his bed in the side room, and I would eavesdrop on all of his phone conversations and all of his guests. And he received the cream of the crop, by which I don't mean the movie stars, but first-rate musicians, people I'd heard about, or would hear about. And on the Herald-Tribune...

ETZ:

Was this at the Chelsea Hotel?

NR:

At the Chelsea Hotel, yeah, where he lived his whole life. And he had a very nice pad at the Chelsea. And his bedroom, and then a dining room where I was, and then the parlor. The second stringers on the Herald-Tribune whom he employed were all, unlike the Times, were all practicing composers.

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ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

He believed in that. Paul Bowles, for example, who was here because of the war. Here, meaning New York. Bill Flanagan, for a while. Jay Harrison, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, others who he couldn't get rid of or who, I dunno, because they already had contracts with the paper.

ETZ:

That's an interesting fact that the...at that time it was considered almost a qualification to be a music critic, to be a working musician.

NR:

Except...

ETZ:

Whereas today, at the Times, it's...you're not allowed to be...

NR:

Even then they weren't allowed to be...

ETZ:

If they could.

NR:

Bec...the idea that you would be biased, 'cause you're going to be biased anyway. And Virgil, amongst critics today, now fifty years later, is still the most revered. They may hate him; they may think he's giddy; but they all learn, first of all, how to write well. In other words, how to write French and English, rather than German and English. [ETZ chuckles] Say what you have to say. Use Anglo-Saxon rather than Latinized. Don't say, "She sang off-pitch" if you can say "She sang out of tune." Or rather, don't say, "She had faulty intonation," which is hoity-toity.

ETZ:

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Mmm-hmm.

NR:

She sang off pitch or she sang out of tune. In other words, direct language to communicate what happened last night. And all of this was a very practical education for me.

ETZ:

Were you writing diaries at this point, Ned, or...

NR:

No.

ETZ:

Did that come later?

NR:

That came a year later, after Morris kicked me...he kicked out. I went to Juilliard then in 1945-46 to make my parents happy and began...I still remember, at Juilliard to get a degree rather than a diploma. You had to take courses in English literature and so forth. And I took those at NYU, and one day the teacher of the class said something that struck me, and I went home and wrote it down. And I bought a little book to write it down and started my diary in 1945, and wrote it, in it ever since.

ETZ:

Hmm. That's interesting. Ned, when did you move to Europe?

NR:

In 19...

ETZ:

Or, who did you study with at Juilliard. Let's get it down.

NR:

At Juilliard, I studied with Bernard Wagenaar.

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ETZ:

And that was in...

NR:

And then I stopped for a year, and I went back to Juilliard to get a Master's, and I had fugue with Giannini. I liked both of them, but I didn't think of...

ETZ:

Did you say you had fugue with him?

NR:

Fugue...

ETZ:

Or that you had a feud with him?

NR:

No, Fugue, with Giannini.

ETZ:

Fugue.

NR:

And I studied piano with a secondary teacher whose name I've forgotten, a woman. I... the things that I learned at Juilliard were not musical things. They were English history, a class in hygiene...

ETZ:

Hygiene.

NR:

...that we had to take as part of the physical education thing because, again, because of the war. And I made friends, but not...there were people at Juilliard, like Robert Craft was at Juilliard then, but it was a much bigger school than Curtis. And so I remember...

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ETZ:

This was up on Morningside Drive?

NR:

Yeah, and...

ETZ:

Not Morningside Drive, but near the...

NR:

Robert Starer was there, but I wasn't buddies with any of them.

ETZ:

Did you make any long-lasting friends?

NR:

I didn't make any lifelong friends at Juilliard. The friends I made were a lot old...I already knew Virgil, his milieu, a whole generation older.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

A generation and a half, and I was more interested in them, at least sociologically, if not...

ETZ:

Sure...

NR:

...carnally, than the people at Juilliard. I don't think I ever had any f-, I had a fling with one person at Juilliard at that time, whose name I've forgotten.

ETZ:

How gallant.

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NR:

I'm not so gallant.

ETZ:

Ned, then you went to Paris?

NR:

Then I wrote a piece at Juilliard called Overture in C.

ETZ:

Ah-hah...

NR:

Then I submitted it to the George Gershwin Memorial Award. Are you listening?

ETZ:

I'm listening. I'm walking over, getting the program.

NR:

And it won, to my astonishment, 'cause I deserved the award, but the piece didn't. It wasn't a very good piece. It won, and this was the second or third year of the this prize, which meant that the piece would be played by the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. Do you have a program for it there?

ETZ:

We certainly do. George...

NR:

Jesus...

ETZ:

...Gershwin Memorial Concert.

NR:

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Well...

ETZ:

Again, corsets and bras.

NR:

Uh, where am I? Intermission. Ned...

ETZ:

There we go.

NR:

Ned Rorem, correctly spelled. And he, Oscar Hammerstein, whom I loved. I just...he was a nice, pock-marked mentor of Steven Sondheim. As a matter of fact, he gave me the thousand dollars on behalf of...B'Nai B'Rith and then they played my piece...

ETZ:

A thousand dollars in 1949 must have gone a long way.

NR:

It meant that...is this '49?...So I bought a ticket to France, around-trip ticket to France, and went to France, but never came back. I went to France like everybody else was going that...in those post-war years, for the summer, but various things, including love, kept me there for the next eight years. And they made me more what I am than anything before, I suppose, living in France amongst the French, rather than among expatriates, and among people who are...It never occurs to you when you're young you're gonna meet legends, let alone befriend them. But then you do, and so the people that I loved became friends, and of course, once they're friends, they're no longer legends, they're just people...

ETZ:

Sure

NR:

...with their vulnerabilities and so on. That plus three major love affairs plus...and my music got to be played in France. I had a Fulbright with Honegger, and I liked him a lot, but I didn't learn enough...a great deal. I went down to Morocco for two years to live, during

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which I really started writing my first of everything: first symphony, first quartet, first thing without being in the rat race of competition that was in Paris and New York, so I got a lot done fortuitously. The right things happened at the right time.. the time and space to be able to work without distraction. And then I met a woman, Marie-Laure de Noailles, again, a generation older than me, rich, famous, powerful...

ETZ:

Now this is in Paris...

NR:

In Paris. I lived in her house then for five years, and again, the ease of the life didn't make me into a gigolo, but into a hard-wo...I think that every composer should be given everything and not have to give anything in return except his music, or her music. And that's how it was, and think that I'm...the Quaker in me is a responsible person.

ETZ:

That's interesting. I'll just take this...

NR:

Michel Piastro, the conductor, was famous for being...for having the Longines Sinfonietta [Symphonette] at that time. Magic words for radio audiences. Alec Templeton was on the same program. And a very nice man, the little I saw of him.

ETZ:

Hmm. It's always interesting to me, when you pull out these programs from the 40s, that the music publishers are advertising, you know, like, here's an ad from Carl Fischer, "Contemporary Music for Piano: Roy Harris, American Ballads, dollar-twenty-five; Alberto Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, each volume a dollar..."

NR:

I didn't realize that at all.

ETZ:

Yeah. Virgil Thomson, Ten Etudes, \$2.50...

NR:

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I copied those pieces, those e...those Ten Etudes.

ETZ:

Oh, really? That's a...

NR:

And I think he wrote...

ETZ:

There's so many intersections, it's...

NR:

And he'd written for E. Robert Schmitz, a major French pianist, despite his name, at that time. And Virgil also got me my piano teacher while I was studying with him, which was a pupil of E. Robert Schmitz, a woman named Betty Crawford. I wonder where she is now...

ETZ:

I love these old programs...

NR:

Don't you, though?

ETZ:

Myself. They're very...so, this was the enabling...this really enabled your...

NR:

Yes, I suppose.

ETZ:

...your stay in, in Europe...got you started.

NR:

And then I cashed in my plane ticket the following September and stayed on in France.

ETZ:

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Mmm-hmm...

NR:

And finally just cashed it in and stayed on in France and Morocco and came back to America for three months in 1952, and then came back to stay in '57.

ETZ:

Now in '56, you had another major performance. This was your first Carnegie Hall performance.

NR:

That's the first Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

The Overture in C.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

The prize-winning overture. Then you had a performance of your First Symphony in 1956, with Anonini...

NR:

Yes, I f...that was...and that's a good piece. It's published by Southern, Pierce Southern now. It was played, gee, perhaps...It was written in 1950, I think, and played in Vienna in '51 by Jonathan Sternberg, who's still around, and played by maybe a dozen different orchestras until it fell out of the repertoire and is still out. And Antonini, and I suppose I knew him through Oliver Daniel who was running the...founded, what was it?

ETZ:

BMI, wasn't it?

NR:

Not BMI, but CR...the thing under BMI. What is it called?

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ETZ:

I don't know...oh, ACA, or...

NR:

ACA. He founded ACA.

ETZ:

Antonini was at CBS, wasn't he?

NR:

I think he was, yes.

ETZ:

He conducted the orchestra at CBS.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And they still, in those days...the major radio stations had symphony orchestras as I understand...

NR:

Yes, WOR, on Wednesdays at midnight. Wallenstein, Bernard Hermann, they had these radio orchestras who played terrific things. The...Bernard Hermann, for example, the first time I ever heard Wozzeck was Aileen Ferrell sang three extracts from Wozzeck at midnight 'cause these were live, and Ben Weber taped them, and I heard the tape, and they're magical. It's the only twelve-tone music that...

ETZ:

Berg.

NR:

...that speaks to me.

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ETZ:

Yeah, yeah, Berg speaks to me, too. It's music that...of course, I feel that when you're talking about twelve-tone technique or any technique, I don't think that technique writes pieces. I think people do, and if there's something that lights a fire in a composer, whatever the technique...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...it's the fire you're interested in, and Berg, to me, has it. There's another bra ad [NR laughs]. Now, what was the National Association for American Composers and Conductors?

NR:

Gosh, I don't know.

ETZ:

Do you remember what it was, or...?

NR:

Now, did they sponsor this concert?

ETZ; Yes, and they did a piece by George Chadwick, Jubilee...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...your First Symphony, advertised as the first New York performance, a piece by John Powell, and Ulysses Kay, Serenade for Orchestra.

NR:

Yeah...John Powell, it seems to me, wrote a "Rhapsodie Negre" for piano. Is that correct?

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ETZ:

Mmm, yeah, that's it.

NR:

And Ulysses, I may or may not have met him. We did...we became...yes, I would have met Ulysses as early as 1951 in Rome.

ETZ:

Now, were you...you came back from Europe for this concert, or...
NRL No.

ETZ:

You didn't come to the concert?

NR:

No, I came back, the way I had in '52, I came back for a season. In this case, I came back for four or five months.

ETZ:

In 1956?

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

But you don't...do you remember the concert, or...?

NR:

I do. I remember that I sat on stage, on one of the little boxes, stage left. And I remember I went with Gene Stein. I remember Gore Vidal was there, of all people. And that's about it. I have, I must have a review of it someplace in a scrapbook, but I don't know where it is.

ETZ:

Are you interested in reviews? Do you...

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NR:

I like reviews.

ETZ:

...collect them, and...

NR:

And I don't like bad reviews, but worst of all I hate no reviews. Yes, I'm interested in reviews. John Corigliano says he never reads any reviews by anybody, about anybody, including himself. And I suppose I read...you have to believe it if he says so...

ETZ:

I find that hard to believe, but I'll ask him.

NR:

Yeah, because one is interested to read reviews.

ETZ:

I think it would be...it's one of those things...it'd be very hard not to...

NR:

I don't think they make any difference. They can't ruin a composer, but they can ruin a performer.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

Because performers save their money to give these concerts that cost a great deal of money, programs, a new dress, all that, and then, then he isn't even reviewed.

ETZ:

Yeah.

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NR:

Or they get lambasted or something, but a composer can't be destroyed by a review. On the other hand, a good review, which is nice to read...I usually read a good review once and a bad review twice. I never agree, because you can't say the essence of anything about music...you can't say it in words, because if you could, you wouldn't need the piece of music.

ETZ:

Yeah, that's right. I think also, you know, whether you're a performer or a composer, - and I do agree that we're in a much better position because the music still exists after the concert and after the review - but I think you have to read those very dispassionately so that, you know, when they call you a genius you don't hold your head and say, "From now on, I'm never takin' out the garbage! I'm a genius!" And if they say something very negative, you don't slash your wrists, you know. That you sort of, you sort of take it as a thing that happens to you because you're in this field. And you sort of have a kind of distance where you don't go all the way with the feeling that one could have.

NR:

I sometimes, as you know, I write prose as well as music, and I write a lot about other people's music, but I never write about my own. Or seldom, mainly because I'm not that interested in what other composers have to say about their music.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm...

NR:

Bec...I'd rather hear the music. I wish they'd just tell me how long it is before they put the tape on, and they, you wrote it for this trumpet player or that violinist or something. You can talk about music until the cows come home, and when composers talk about it... I had to talk about the other day at a pre-concert lecture, and I very sweetly said to Rob Schwartz, who was the Ellen Zwilich in my life that day, there's three ways you can talk about it. You can talk about it in the sentimental way, for women's clubs, which no longer exist, about "I was in love. I had diverticulitis at this time, but I also took walks under the moonlight, and suddenly the truth came to me." Well, that's bullshit. Then you...

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ETZ:

Probably, except for the diverticulitis.

NR:

Except, yeah. [laughs] The...I would like to think that is, too. Oh gosh...then you can talk to students or young people about the second theme and the third theme, and I try..."I think I was doing this in the piece, but, in fact, I've forgotten." I've read criticisms, or rather, statements on my music but, and said, "Gee, did I really do that?", in a program note. I'd forgotten. And then the most interesting way is simply, how much money was the commission? How long did it take to write it? People like to know that, for some reason. How long did it take you to write that? Can, can you really hear all those notes in your head? You know those questions. And, How do you orchestrate? and so forth. Those all have practical answers, and you could put the lay person at rest by trying to be cordial in your answers. But when I write about other people's music, it's like you were mentioning a while ago - John Simon writing plays, and you want to go hear the play. Usually, with music criticism, it's too late. By the time they write it up, it's already in the universe someplace. What do I do? What I listen for in any music, including Richard Strauss, is a French edge to it, which is what gets me. And if it's French for me, then it's French for me. That satisfies me. And insofar as it's German - in other words, prolix rather than economical - I may admire it and respect it, but I don't need it.

ETZ:

You, uh...

NR:

That goes for Schubert, too...

ETZ:

I have heard you say before that... [break in tape]

ETZ:

...really, the first really, really big performances. This is Leonard Bernstein with the New York Philharmonic, 195- 1959, in April.

NR:

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Yes. I clearly, clearly, clearly remember that. He, Bill Russo was on the same program, and Maynard...

ETZ:

And Irving Fine, I see.

NR:

And Irving Fine, and Russo...Maynard Ferguson had a...

ETZ:

Right.

NR:

I mention that because I saw Maynard Ferguson in the...picture in the paper the other day. He's still playing the trumpet.

ETZ:

I she really?

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

I remember him...

NR:

Hoary old thing with grey hair...

ETZ:

Yeah...

NR:

And a trumpet raised to his lips. And I was impressed...

ETZ:

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Russo was a sort of big-band arranger, wasn't he?

NR:

For Woody Herman.

ETZ:

And was this that kind of a piece? It's his Symphony...

NR:

Yeah, it was...yeah...

ETZ:

...No. 2 in C, "Titans." Premiere...

NR:

Yeah...

ETZ:

with Maynard Ferguson.

NR:

...little bit pretentious, like the title. But I remember the piece well. Mine was, was a better piece than his, but then...

ETZ:

And this was your Third Symphony...

NR:

Yeah, the second was written for Vladimir Sokolov in California. It's a less good piece. It has nice things in it. It's in three movements, I think, maybe four, maybe three...

ETZ:

The concert opened with Irving Fine, Serious Song.

NR:

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Yeah, I remember that piece. Short piece.

ETZ:

Your Third Symphony. Then Russo's Second Symphony. Intermission.

NR:

That was a...

ETZ:

Then Isaac Stern played the Beethoven.

NR:

That's right, yeah. And I had to sit through that Beethoven four times.

ETZ:

Here again I see they're advertising printed music. Vocal scores and study scores in the programs as well as...

NR:

I remember tha...

ETZ:

This, this advertisement for Heifetz, RCA Victor...

NR:

...the rehearsal for the Third Symphony, the first rehearsal. I was late because I was on unemployment insurance at the time, having written background music for a Tennessee Williams play, which then folded. So, I qualified for unemployment. You had to wait in line every week to get your check. And the irony; here is a major orchestra in a major hall with a major conductor doing the premier of my symphony, but I'm late because of unemployment insurance. That's how composers fit into the American scene.

ETZ:

Yes, I have one of...not quite the same story but a very similar one.

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NR:

It's sordid [ETZ laughs].

ETZ:

Here's a picture of Bernstein in 1950.

NR:

God, he looked good then, didn't he?

ETZ:

Yeah, beautiful.

NR:

Tilson-Thomas imitates him, doesn't he? The picture I have of me and Lenny is much later. It's just about eight years ago. I put it in this book, so you can take that now, if you want.

ETZ:

Yes, it'd be nice.

NR:

Uh, it's by...here it is. [to Camera Operator] Is this good enough for you?

Camera Operator: Yeah, sure, sure.

NR:

That's Lenny on the right. [ETZ laughs] That's me, standing up. And we can pretend it's in Carnegie Hall, though, in fact, it's at the Dakota. The earlier picture of me and Bill Flanagan and Virgil is...

ETZ:

Yes, I'd like to see those, 'cause we don't have programs, but...

NR:

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Well, here's, here it is. This is for Carnegie Hall, an...a publicity picture. That's Bill Flanagan in the middle...

ETZ:

...one could never tell.

NR:

...Virgil on the left, and me on the right. Publicity picture, 1959. [to Camera Operator] Can you see this OK?

Camera Operator: Yes.

ETZ:

Ned, tell us about this, 'cause this is something we don't have programs for. But you and William Flanagan...

NR:

Bill, Bill Flanagan was my best friend among composers...platonic and mutual admiration society. And we were amongst the three or four Americans writing songs who gave a damn about writing songs, meaning pieces of under five minutes for voice and piano.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And we decided, why not make an issue of it? And so we gave a concert of just his and my music, the two of us, in 1959. Of songs. Pat Neway sang mine, Patricia Neway, who was pretty well-known then as Menotti's chief diva. I don't know where she is now. She married Lee Hoiby's boyfriend, and they both got fat, and they're rolling around in a kitchen someplace in Vermont, last I heard. But she was a major star. She did Magda Sorel in The Consul, and in France, people just laid down in the street when she came over...came by. Plain looking, a peasant-ish, with a beautiful voice and intense presence on a stage. Anyway, she was my singer. And Bill had some people of his own. The Herald-Tribune, of course, reviewed it dithyrambically. Bill was on the Tribune at the time. Jay Harrison reviewed it. Virgil had long since been off the Tribune, so I forget who who...who was the big number, Francis Perkins, maybe, on the, on the Herald-Tribune. So we decided...

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ETZ:

How many newspapers were there in New York at the time?

NR:

About eight.

ETZ:

That's a real change, isn't it?

NR:

Then we decided to give another concert but have a guest artist, so we asked Aaron Copland. And Aaron accompanied his Emily Dickinson songs. We said, "If you play on the program, we'll get the audience. You don't have to go around begging, as people always do." Then we gave a third one in which Virgil was the guest artist. And then we gave a last one in which, again, it was a mixed bag: Him, Bill and me and other songwriters of the time. Daniel Pinkham was one. And then we felt we'd done our good deed, and that was the end of that. But they were a, sort of a legendary thing, we like to feel, and...like the Sessions-Copland concerts...

ETZ:

Yeah, I was just gonna say, this is about the same time as the Sessions-Copland concerts.

NR:

No, that was...

ETZ:

Was that...

NR:

Easily, no, that was fifteen, twenty years earlier. That was a thirty...

ETZ:

Earlier?

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NR:

...thirties thing. But that was Carnegie Recital Hall. And I did a lot of stuff at Carnegie Recital Hall.

ETZ:

Now, this was by way of, sort of introducing you back to your home in the States?

NR:

I suppose so, yeah, 'cause I had known Bill in the forties, before I went to Europe, and I never dug him particularly. And when I came back from Europe, and he was...he lived with Edward Albee. They were a thing, an item. And Edward had money, and he had to a large extent subsidized these, the first of these concerts.

ETZ:

Oh, that's very interesting.

NR:

Yeah. I remember he paid for an ad in The Village Voice, and The Villager, which may still exist.

ETZ:

This was in, this would be the late...

NR:

1959 through '61.

ETZ:

So where does this fit in his output?

NR:

When he became famous overnight with Zoo Story, he no longer, uh...

ETZ:

But that must have been around this time.

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NR:

It was around, yeah, he...actually, Zoo Story was 1960.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? was 1962. Then Bill, who always liked to think of himself as a great star, but he wasn't, began to languish and finally died in '69. Whereas, Edward went on to high places and then faded, and now he's back again. I never see him.

ETZ:

It's interesting how you have always had a circle that included more than just musicians. That Albee would be an important part, Edward Albee would be an important part of your cycle is very interesting to me.

NR:

Yeah, I've always had...I certainly know as many literary people as I do musical people. A lot of music people I know in the line of duty, like performers. People...composers don't really know composers, performers much, except the ones that are playing their music. I'm certainly not interested in hobnobbing with Itzhak Perlman, except when I have to sue him, as I did, because he lives across the street from me. And he has this fucking air-conditioner. Did I tell you about that?

ETZ:

No, I didn't know about this!

NR:

Well, he li...I've been where I am for twenty-five years, and he moved into this house three years ago with all of his wheelchairs. And on the ceiling is a ten-million-dollar air conditioner that throbs twenty-four hours a day. So I wrote him a letter. I said, "This won't do." And he was very nice about it. I know him slightly from parties. When I got the Grammy, he was the one who gave it to me. Only I wasn't there, because I didn't think I was going to get it. So he gave it to a hand. It is an uninteresting story. I said to him, "Look, you're a musician too. How can you live with this going on all night?" and "I hate coming

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home in the summer. I ha...It ruins my sleep at night and it ruins my work in the daytime." Finally, after a year-and-a-half, he's done something to it.

ETZ:

Got it insulated, yeah.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

But you sued him?

NR:

No...

ETZ:

Oh, you just...

NR:

...but I would have done something.

ETZ:

You just pleaded with him.

NR:

I...he has a secretary with whom...she and I are on a first-name basis and never met with all these endless phone calls. And she sent over an acoustician and stuff. Anyway, I just want you to know that I know Itzhak Perlman.

ETZ:

Sorry about the circumstances.

NR:

But he's not...what do they do? You do things with these superstars more than I do. You write concertos for them. If they ask me...

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ETZ:

Well, I feel very close to musicians.

NR:

You mean performing musicians.

ETZ:

Yeah, and you know I spent a good part of my life as a professional violinist, and... so I just feel very much a kinship with the people who are performing. And with some performers I have long-term, really important relationships.

NR:

Well, some of them have...are well rounded and have brains, too. Leon Fleischer, for example, was in Paris.

ETZ:

Yes, he's an interesting man.

NR:

And he came to France when we all were, only he's a little bit younger by three or four years, which meant a lot in those days. It doesn't now. And Eugene Istomin is an extremely intellectual type. But still, they are in a business of being run by a manager, which composers aren't. It's not as cutthroat, and it's not...

ETZ:

Their world or our world?

NR:

Yes, their world. Cutthroat is perhaps not the right term, but managers are as much at fault as anybody in determining the repertory these days...of everybody...so that...

ETZ:

Have you noticed a change over these years that we're looking at? You think that managers used to be more adventurous, or...?

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NR:

Managers have always thought about making money, and if anything stands in the way, the repertory is the first to go. It's certainly true today. It's certainly true of every single orchestra in America. It's certainly true of singers. There is not one singer who can give a recital and even break even, unless they are a superstar. And then they're a superstar because of their opera reputation, not their song reputation.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

So nobody writes songs anymore. I think, and man...huge, all-powerful czars of management don't exist anym...longer, like Hurac and Judson. But there are small, rather tough managers, and some of them...But if they've gotten more than three pianists, the rest of them suffer. They just promote one or two. And I don't...but I don't know them socially anymore because there's nothing much that I have to do with them. If a performer wants to commission me to do something, it's done through them and the...my publisher, rather than through their manager...

ETZ:

So you don't...

NR:

Maybe through their manager, but I try to stay out of it.

ETZ:

Yeah. Ned, here is another, the next performance you had at Carnegie Hall, which is the Detroit Symphony with Sixten Ehrling, uh...

NR:

Oh, before that...wait a second. In 1956, something very touching happened. David Diamond said, "It's time for Mitropoulos and you to get together, and what we will do is that I, David, will take you for lunch at La Scala restaurant on 56th Street."

ETZ:

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Yeah, that was his haunt.

NR:

"Dmitri is always there." So David and I went to La Scala. This is in 19...exactly in 1956. And he was sitting with somebody. And David said, "This is Ned Rorem." And Dmitri said, "David has told me about you. Come and see me next...Call me up." So I called him up, and we made a date for me to go and see him at the Great Northern Hotel the following Wednesday. Meanwhile, the previous Monday, I had a horrible experience of a love affair that collapsed fr...between France and America. And I was in a state of really prostrate desolation, but I went to see Mitropoulos. And we chatted, and blah-blahed, and finally I said, "Look, I'm in a...I'm in a terrible state. This is what has happened." And he instantly put aside the music. He said, "Let's talk about it, my dear boy," and so forth. "Let's go down to the Blue Ribbon and have supper." So we went to the Blue Ribbon and had supper, and we talked about it. And he said, I still remember him saying, "How I envy you to be able to suffer this way from love. It's so long out of my life." [ETZ laughs.] And then, I left two scores with him. One was Design, for Orchestra, which had been recorded by the Louisvi...commissioned and recorded by the Louisville. He programmed it for October of 1957 in Carnegie Hall whereupon, and this is history, for the first time since the death of Abraham Lincoln, Carnegie Hall, or else the Philharmonic, I forget which, went on strike. Is that in the archives? It's gotta be. And the whole concert...

ETZ:

I'm sure it's somewhere, but...

NR:

The first concert...the first half of the whole season was cancelled. And I was feeling pretty lousy because of that, because I wanted him to play my piece. So what he did was he played another piece under other auspices. He played a piece called...

ETZ:

What year did you say this was?

NR:

I met him in '56.

ETZ:

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'56.

NR:

The piece would have been the opening concert of 1957. In other words, September, October. And look and see if that has a "cancelled" written across.

ETZ:

Yeah, e don't, we don't even have them, so it didn't show up. We have '56 and we have '58, '59...

NR:

I would like to have known him better. He then played a Sinfonia for fifteen woodwinds of mine at a YMCA concert...YMHA concert. He got sick, ad I went to see him the hospital. I still remember it. He died whenever he died. This is a few months...few years later. But he looked beautiful in the hospital. He had a huge room at New York Hospital, and he played with Greek worry beads, which I'd never seen before. And he was one of a kind.

ETZ:

Yeah...

NR:

Meaning that, as a conductor, he was unmarried as a conductor. There's no such thing as an unmarried conductor. And he played the music he wanted to play, rather than what was forced upon him. And yet, he was a virtuoso conductor.

ETZ:

We have looked at programs of Mitropoulos here, with David Diamond and Morton Gould and Lukas Foss. And they were extraordinarily interesting programs.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And it seems to me that when people who really had a relationship with him, a professional relationship with him, speak of him, they all feel very strong feelings about

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him. He must have been a very interesting man. I read this...the new book, the Trotter book.

NR:

It is not a good book.

ETZ:

But it does depict the character.

NR:

But it's wrong. There's a quote from me on the back of that book, by the way, and if I'd known the book was going to be what it is, 'cause I gave the quote when Oliver Daniel wrote the book. And it applies to Oliver Daniel. But this guy took all of Oliver Daniel's notes and made sort of a sensational thing out of it. I resent it.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm. What specifically?

NR:

Well, all the homosexual parts, for example. He makes him into a...including me, into that whole thing, which is incorrect.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

Mitropoulos - I wouldn't call him Dmitri at all - Mitropoulos and I were strictly professional friends except for one compassionate evening where we talked about other things than music. But he was very close to David Diamond, to Lenny...

ETZ:

Yeah, David likes that book very much. He's the one that recommended it to me.

NR:

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Yeah, David says anything to anybody, and he would've said that to this person. The fact...obviously you don't know what...who David knows and doesn't know, except that David did know Mitropoulos, and they were very fond of each other.

ETZ:

There was a letter to the editor of the musicians...the International Musician music paper, which I received because I was given a lifetime honorary membership in local 802. And it was a letter from a former player in the in the Philharmonic who wrote about this book - how unfair it was about the orchestra, how it cast them as mischievous bad guys, and...

NR:

I wonder if they were.

ETZ:

...the cause of the downfall of Mitropoulos, and he thought this was very unjust.

NR:

Oh, said in this book...one thing he said was that Lenny Bernstein choreographed Mitropoulos' downfall so that he, Lenny, could take the job. I don't believe it for one minute. Lenny was a lot of things, but he wasn't...he wasn't a shit.

ETZ:

David, David believes that, I know.

NR:

That Lenny was the cause of Mitropoulos' downfall? Well, they'd know...they'd know better than I. But...

ETZ:

It doesn't square with what I knew about Bernstein either. He didn't have to...

NR:

No, he, his...

ETZ:

For one thing...

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NR:

He cer...no, he certainly didn't. It makes good reading but it's unfair.

ETZ:

Does it ever strike you when you're thinking about history, you know, we talk about the eighteenth century as though we knew something about it. And here's something where we're talking about real people we have known, and we're talking about a period that's not even a half a century old, or maybe it...

NR:

But everything...

ETZ:

...and how ephemeral all these things are, and how the judgments about what people were like, even, are difficult to make.

NR:

Everything is Rashomon from the minute it happens. I mean, the three of us right here, the four of us in this room, if we talk about it to...go our separate ways tomorrow, it'll be, it'll be four different impressions.

ETZ:

It's interesting.

NR:

And we remember what we choose to remember. We remember...the past is always golden in its way. But so many people I know say, "But I don't remember anything." But I do. I remember everything. I write it down. But I may be...but David remembers everything because he writes it down too, but he remembers it wrong. [laughter] And yet he's David and it's his truth, and he has as much right to it as anybody else. And thinking... looking, as I was last night at the pyramids and the Sphinx on a television program which was interesting. We don't even know about those pharaohs, much less the peasants, or whatever you call them, that built it. These trillions of people on Earth who have left nothing of themselves. Not even the dust of their bodies, which molds immediately.

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ETZ:

And yet that, that's such an intriguing story because when you...I was in the Egyptian museum in Cairo, and it's just an absolutely stunning experience. The quality of the work. The artistry. Not just the craftsmanship, but the visionary artistry of these people we know so little about. It's really quite extraordinary. Actually, back to the present, or the pa...the most recent past, here is a program from 1965...

NR:

Yep.

ETZ:

...with the Detroit Symphony.

NR:

Ormandy apparently did Eagles in 1960 - a ten minute piece which he premiered and then took on tour quite a bit.

ETZ:

Did he do it here? Because we don't have 'em.

NR:

But he did do it here.

ETZ:

He did it here.

NR:

He did it here, and it was also...and I wasn't present. But it...because I was someplace else that night, which did not amuse him. 'Cause I still remember him saying, "Well, if you have something else to do, I don't want to keep you from it." We were not buddies at all. He never...he never even said, "Do you want to use the bathroom?" which he said to David Del Tredici, I remember. [Laughter.] But he played five of my pieces, and I love him for that. They were wonderful performances and conscientious ones. Up until before... just before he went sort of gaga. In what...what was it? Sunday Morning, which is in eight movements, he wanted to cut one of the movements 'cause it was just really making it too

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hard, and I said, "You and only you can do it, so do it." And so he did. And I like him for that. And it was always "Mister Rorem, Mister Rorem." But I didn't call him anything - he called me Mr. Rorem. And he did Lions...and that would be on a concert...I mean Eagles.

ETZ:

No, he did Eagles, yes.

NR:

And that would be on a concert that was privately subsidized. This comes back to me. This is remembering.

ETZ:

So that might be the reason we don't have any archive.

NR:

It would have been paid for by...some electric company or some...or a fundraising thing. It was a non-reviewed event that took place at Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

Was it the Philadelphia Orchestra.

NR:

Yes...yes.

ETZ:

Okay, so then it would be in the archives of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

NR:

Yes, it would be in their archives.

ETZ:

[to the camera] For the record, the performance of Eagles with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy in 1960 was a concert that might appear in the Philadelphia Orchestra archives. [to NR] Do you have anything else before '65?

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NR:

No, not on this list.

ETZ:

Okay.

NR:

It would...I'm not including recitalists.

ETZ:

Yes, we're just...

NR:

'Cause recital people...This is just orchestra things.

ETZ:

Okay. There's a lot of recital stuff here. But here's the Detroit Symphony with Sixten Ehrling...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...doing Lions.

NR:

He had done the premiere of Lions earlier that year in Detroit. Then he did it in here...at the same week that Miss Julie was premiered at the City Opera on 55th Street.

ETZ:

That was a nice, busy week.

NR:

It was, yeah. And...

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ETZ:

This was world premiere of Lions...

NR:

It was.

ETZ:

According to this.

NR:

The New York premiere. He had done the world premiere in Detroit.

ETZ:

Oh, well...

NR:

And since Miss Julie was in November, this would have been November or perhaps late October.

ETZ:

This was October 28th.

NR:

Okay.

ETZ:

And it claims to be the world premiere.

NR:

But it can't have been, 'cause I remember.

ETZ:

But we'll, we'll tell, [to camera] we'll tell the world that it wasn't really the world premiere.

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NR:

He had definitely done it in Detroit earlier. And if I'm remembering wrong, somebody knows the truth. It'll be in the Detroit archives, too, I guess.

ETZ:

Guess who's playing the Sibelius Violin Concerto on this program.

NR:

Who?

ETZ:

Itzhak Perlman.

NR:

Was he on that program?

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

In fact, the first time I ever met him would have been then, 'cause we met at a radio station, WNYC. And I'd never heard of him, and he'd never heard of me. And we both very nice to each other, and he kept talking about baseball...

ETZ:

He must have been...

NR:

...what was it, or football.

ETZ:

...quite young.

NR:

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Yeah, he was. So that's when I first...and we would have been at NYC to plug this concert of Li...Ehrling concert.

ETZ:

Interesting little sign of the times, right here we have...here's an ad for the Columbia Masterworks series of Stravinsky recordings, which was such an important...

NR:

That's what Goddard Lieberson was doing in those days. And that was considered quite a venture, even for Stravinsky, the most famous composer then, and of our century. The... th...and...

ETZ:

Well, it certainly was. I mean, he did...it says here forty, more than forty works. I remember this and finding out about this. It was an incredible...this was Columbia Records getting behind a composer that Goddard Lieberson felt was very important.

NR:

And after he died his wife, Vera Serena [Sudeinka], took over...sponsored a lot of those pieces.

ETZ:

Hmm. Interesting. Ned, my next thing is 1971. And the...

NR:

Well, I've got...what do I have? Okay, 1972. What's that?

ETZ:

I have the, the Utah Symphony under Abravanel doing your Symphony No. 3.

NR:

That's right. I forgot to put that on this list.

ETZ:

The same work that Bernstein...

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NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...did the premiere of.

NR:

He also recorded it, and it was reissued recently on a...Four American Symphonies, I think it's called.

ETZ:

This also was...as I recall, the Utah Symphony under Abravanel...

NR:

It was.

ETZ:

...did quite a bit of recording.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

And it's interesting to see that these were...there was always the Louisville Project, I think, for...during this period.

NR:

Yeah, but Abravanel didn't commission pieces.

ETZ:

Uh, no, but he recorded.

NR:

He recorded pieces.

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ETZ:

Do you remember what label that was?

NR:

Yeah, it was the label Mandels...somebody named Mendelssohn...

ETZ:

Vox.

NR:

Vox boxes, they were called.

ETZ:

Ralph [George] Mendelssohn, would have been.

NR:

I never met him, I don't think.

ETZ:

But now, Vox was a commercial company, and the Stravinsky series of recordings was on Columbia.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Somebody considered these potential sales. It's very interesting. It's a change, I think, that's taken place. I don't think that when Goddard Lieberson did this he was looking at the bottom line. I think he thought of it as an important project...

NR:

He did, definitely.

ETZ:

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...rather than an immediate money-maker. The next thing I have is the first of your Carnegie Hall performances with Leontyne Price. Um, 1972.

NR:

Yeah, I know Leontyne if anyone knows her...

ETZ:

Here's a picture from around that time.

NR:

...in 1954 in Rome. Rome had a...

ETZ:

Did you spend a...spend time in Rome...

NR:

I spent...

ETZ:

...at the Academy or anything?

NR:

No. I lived next door to the Academy, in sin with another person. And there was a big festival in 1954, before I went to live there, of contemporary music sponsored by Nabokov... Nabokov. And that was the height of Boulez's fame, and the concert was all of this unlistenable stuff until Sam and Leontyne in this...I think the...

ETZ:

Sam Barber, you mean?

NR:

Samuel Barber and Leontyne in this same dress. It was blue...came out on the stage and Leontyne sang the Hermit Songs. Well, you can't laugh her off because that was the most beautiful voice in the world.

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ETZ:

Oh, I loved her voice.

NR:

But the music..I still remember when they finished the Hermit Songs, somebody in the audience went [sings] da-da-da-dum. [laughs] It was considered absolute trash. I loved it.

ETZ:

Really?

NR:

Yeah. You don't do that in this day and age, in 1954, in Europe.

ETZ:

Do you feel...?

NR:

She was rather humble in those days. That's before she was at the Met.

ETZ:

She wasn't at the Met yet?

NR:

She was at the Met...

ETZ:

Oh, you mean '54.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Yeah, but at this time she was, at '72. She would have, yeah...

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NR:

In '72, oh yeah, she was a big star.

ETZ:

You mentioned the...this issue of, well, now our word would be "politically correct." I mean like the stylistically correct ways to write music, and everything else is considered trash or something.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Has this ever been a real influence in your life ...

NR:

No. I lived through all of the twelve-tone scare, which came like a plague. And Boulez was almost single-handedly accountable for that. He was very persuasive, the way Hitler was persuasive. He had a certain charm. I don't think Hitler had any charm, but Boulez did. America, having been cut off for nearly ten years from Europe, developed its own style during the war years. And as soon as the war stopped, Boulez reared his ugly head, although he was not immediately a prophet in his own land. But Aaron Copland capitulated. Stravinsky capitulated. They all started writing music that they didn't truly believe, I – [break in tape]

ETZ:

...of stylistic control in music, and you felt, in the 50s, you were speaking of the concert in Rome...

NR:

That virus, and of course I'm being sort of facetious, I think what happens in the arts happens. There's no good or there's no bad. One can tell in retrospect, usually centuries later, that there are weak periods and strong periods, and fallow periods and fruitful periods. Art doesn't progress, except insofar as it advances. Progress in itself is not necessarily good. Cancer progresses. But periods in music go from contrapuntal to harmonic and then back to contrapuntal and harmonic forever. And ever since music has

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been "Music," in other words, the past 600 or even 500 years by...composers who sign their names, unlike painters, who go back...or sculptors, at least, who go back thousands of years. We don't know the names of composers 1000 years ago. They've gone from complex periods, like Bach to...contrapuntal periods to harmonic periods, Beethoven and Chopin and then into...and then they revert to Wagner, who is then dethroned by Les Six in France, and then...Each of these things lasts about a ten...two generations, and then they go back. We're coming out of the twelve-tone or integral serialist period. But I was in the middle of it all when it...and I couldn't believe what was happening because in Chicago, all that twelve-tone stuff have proved a little bit fruitless. [to off-camera person] Is that alright?

ETZ:

Just go ahead and talk, and they'll tape you up as they go.

NR:

I was surprised...I contend, and I can't prove it, but no one can prove otherwise, that often, great trends in the arts happen according to one strong personality, and Boulez has that personality. And I really think that he himself swayed the way music went for a very long time. And certainly in Paris and in Germany and in New York. And, by extension, with Stravinsky and Copland and other people who were very much tonal composers. And I felt...I said to myself, "Have I...?" It was like going to Northwestern and hearing people play Chopin, "Have I missed the boat? My music is not at all in that style." And people were much more intolerant in those days than they are now...composers, of each other's...If you don't write this kind of music, you're wrong. And Wuorinen's statement of, "Any composer who not felt the necessity of the serial method is not a composer." To which I agree, if you omit the word not. [ETZ chuckles]. Then when things began to come back with tonal music, with a vengeance, with Rochberg and Del Tredici and later, Steve Reich. I felt, as I've often said, like the prodigal son's brother. I was...always been a good boy.

ETZ:

You were always at home, yes.

NR:

Yeah, and...

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ETZ:

Well, Ned, don't you think, though, that...I mean, during this period, it's true that Stravinsky and Copland did pay homage to...

NR:

That's what I'm saying.

ETZ:

But, but also it's true that David Diamond was going his own way . You were going your own way. Lou Harrison. I mean, we could come up with a long list of American composers who...

NR:

But David Diamond and Lou Harrison were very much out of vogue in this period. People turned up their noses at them.

ETZ:

But it didn't stop them from...

NR:

No, they did what they were doing. David capitulated...

ETZ:

I didn't, you either, which is very...

NR:

It's...and as I say, I would like to be a whore, but I couldn't. So a lot of people were raised in this Eric...in this Fromm condition. What was his first name?

ETZ:

Paul Fromm.

NR:

Paul Fromm. Nice man.

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ETZ:

You mean Paul Fromm, the, the patron of...

NR:

Yeah. Did you ever meet him?

ETZ:

Yes, I certainly did.

NR:

Well, could you ever understand a word he said?

ETZ:

No.

NR:

I though I'd once like to give a party and ask him, ask Bernard Holland, who stutters pitifully, and ask Virgil Thomson who [speaking in falsetto] speaks way up there, and see what the conversion goes to. But Fromm, I think since this music was so difficult, big orchestras never played it, so a whole new outlet, which was the university, is what played it, thanks to the money of Paul, Paul Fromm and the chutzpah of Pierre Boulez. I feel nothing came out of it, nothing, but that's me talking. And who am I? Looking back, though, I can't think of any catalog of music that's emerged from this. I think that Elliott Carter probably wouldn't have done what he is doing if he didn't have the intellectual push of Boulez behind him. And he's still played all over the...

ETZ:

In Europe, yeah.

NR:

All over the world. And Europe is still a little bit serial minded.

ETZ:

Looking forward to...

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NR:

If you live long enough, you'll come back...something good happens. But if Elliott Carter had died at the age of forty, he would not be known today for the early works that he did. Likewise John, John Cage, I think. And perhaps, Milton Babbitt is not known for his music, he's known for his premises.

ETZ:

It's interesting, though, we historically have two models of composers: there's the composer that peaks very early and does fabulous work, and, you know, such as Mozart...

NR:

Yeah, well, there's no rules.

ETZ:

...you could die at thirty-five and, and have this incredible repertoire behind you...

NR:

Yeah...

ETZ:

...or Schubert. And then there's.

NR:

And then there's another. There's other people who peak and then stop, but live to be eighty. Sibelius, for example.

ETZ:

Yes...

NR:

And, I think, is it Rossini?

ETZ:

Rossini, yes, absolutely.

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NR:

They just stop when they, like, when they've made their money, as though it were a practical thing. Then there's...

ETZ:

But then there's a composer like Haydn, and like Verdi, who later in life, began to really sort of morph, be what they are...

NR:

So there's no rules. And Verdi certainly wrote...

ETZ:

I don't think so.

NR:

There's no rules. And there's other people who commit suicide very young. There are other people who, and you can't tell until a person is dead whether they've...or, there's other composers who change all the time, like painters, like Stravinsky and Picasso. Although, in retrospect, you can see it all came from the pen of a single person. And then there's others like Ravel or Chopin who wrote the same music all their life, first-class, nearly all of it, not an awful lot compared to Milhaud, for example, or Mozart, who did write s...who did write some ordinary pieces. And certainly Milhaud did. The prolific composers are uneven. But others like, say, like Ravel and Chopin wrote good music at the beginning and kept...they spoke the same language their whole life.

ETZ:

I suppose the real challenge for any composer, just as any artist, I guess, is to have a life in music and to make sure that you're doing...the next thing you do is the next thing that's right for you artistically and, and to have this kind of continuity...

NR:

Again, the...yeah, the...you're talking about after the fact. You can't make a recipe and say, "This is what the composer does." 'Cause no sooner do you do that, then you...then someone breaks the rule by writing a masterpiece in a completely different genre.

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ETZ:

Oh, absolutely. I, I agree with that, but I do think that each of us individually has to face this issue. Like, what is the next proper piece to be writing? And having this sense of continuity in you life...

NR:

Well, if you get to a place where you and I are, the people...the next piece that we write is a piece we usually want to write.

ETZ:

NR:

So if it's a commission, I usually...and people commission you to do what they know you can do rather than what you can't...what...I'm inclined to get vocal commissions or things of that sort. But if I wanted another...if I wanted to write a piece, you can usually arrange to get a commission for what you feel you've got to write at this point.

ETZ:

Do you turn down commissions?

NR:

Yeah, if there's not enough money, I'll turn it down.

ETZ:

What about if you...

NR:

Not if it's something I'm dying to do, or if it's something that I don't approve of. I wrote a piece, for example, that was not played - which was rather insulting - fairly recently. Actually it was for the Singing Sergeants, the Singing Sergeants...

ETZ:

Oh, the Air Force...

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NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

in Washington?

NR:

And they happened to be quite good.

ETZ:

I know.

NR:

And they had done a piece of mine, and so they asked me to do a piece, and so I did it for mixed chorus and four different pieces. I called it, I can't quite remember what I called it. Present Laughter - it's from Shakespeare. It's quite giddy, except one of them. The forms are all humoristic: One is by Dryden and one's by Shakespeare, and one's by an Englishman from the late nineteenth century, and another one is Donne, about young love and stuff - for four horns, piano and mixed chorus.

ETZ:

Why didn't they do it?

NR:

And they didn't...it wasn't done, and it wasn't done, and it wasn't done, and Boosey and Hawkes weren't able to get answers to their letters, and where the hell? And you have to fill out millions of forms. And it was the Singing Sergeants, which I'm against in principle anyway, because I don't believe in wars. But I think the people...I think that soldiers should be singing instead of killing people, so that's okay. Then I got a letter just a few months ago from...a month or less ago from...the old head of it is in a different...has changed jobs and the new man is thrilled to be inheriting my piece because he loves it. He didn't say that the previous man didn't like it and was disappointed in it. I feel he should have done it anyway.

ETZ:

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Yeah, just for the record, this, the piece that Leontyne did here first, Leontyne Price, was your Psalm 148. And there were three different performances with Leontyne Price. But I'd love to get to this next...1975, where Thomas Schippers did a work of yours called...

NR:

Air Music.

ETZ:

Air Music.

NR:

I had known Tommy Schippers, who began his career as an accompanist at...in, in Pre-Spoleto days for Menotti.

ETZ:

Hmm.

NR:

So, he was the pianist. I think he was the rehearsal pianist for the Consul. Tommy was...

ETZ:

Here is...Schippers at that time.

NR:

He was dashingly handsome, as he always was.

ETZ:

Beautiful man, yeah.

NR:

If he's your type. But, I...man, everybody agrees he's handsome, but I don't know if he turns everybody on. But he turned Menotti on, and therefore became the official conductor in that whole milieu of Barber and Menotti. And so I met him in the line of duty, too. And I remember early...I remember him saying something rather unpleasant about me in an interview sometime in the early...late 60's, coulda been. And then he called me up once, said, "We want you to write a piece." And so I wrote it, and we talked about the price and

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everything on the telephone. And he said it should be a f...sizable affair for the Cincinnati Orchestra, and I wrote a piece called Air Music. In ei...

ETZ:

And I...

NR:

In sev...in the summer of '73 or '74. And...

ETZ:

This was premiered.

NR:

Then he premiered it in '75, I guess, in Cincinnati, and I went to it. He was a hard-working, responsible conductor with his own tastes. And his tastes in contemporary music were strict...were definitely tonal pieces like Barber and Menotti and me.

ETZ:

Did he play much contemporary music?

NR:

What he played was always that.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

He certainly wasn't playing Ralph Shapey.

ETZ:

Ned, we should...

NR:

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He was a pretty good pianist. He got married too, by the way, and didn't have any children. He married a woman [Elaine Phipps] in...who's from the Bier [?] family who died quite young of cancer, and Tommy Schippers...

ETZ:

He died very young.

NR:

He died very young too, of pretty much the same thing. The piece that I wrote for him, I liked the piece, and I liked his performance and I liked the...Cincinnati. And then he played it in New York, and then it won the Pulitzer Prize. So of course, he was...he felt vindicated, I suppose, from having asked me, and I certainly felt warmly toward him. I'm not sure I ever saw him again. However, the Cincinnati Orchestra, a couple of years later, asked me to write a piece for cello and piano and orchestra, and I wrote it...

ETZ:

Remembering...

NR:

Remember...it was...

ETZ:

Remembering Tommy.

NR:

Called Double Concerto, at first, in Ten Movements.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And I remember that the man who wrote [sic] it..and his wife was cellist, and he was a pianist...came to see me in New York and said, "We're very disconcerted by this piece you've written. We thought it would be much more difficult, much more, uh, up-to-date..." All sorts of things. And I said, "What'd you ask me for if you want these, these terms?" They didn't...then she died. So they didn't play it. The following year it was played, but the

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conductor died, who was...married to the current wife of Tony Fell, and Janice Susskind, Susskind died.

ETZ:

Walter Susskind, you mean.

NR:

Yeah. So two young people played it under George Mester. I li...It's a very nice piece, and then I changed the title to Remembering Tommy. And cut one of the ten movements and used it in another piece, and it's...it was played in New York at Juilliard, and it hasn't been played since.

ETZ:

Hmm.

NR:

And, well, that's Cincinnati.

ETZ:

You know, it's interesting, Ned, you describe yourself as, you know, a vocal writer, a writer of vocal music, but most of what we've picked out of the archives so far, and this is from 1945 to 1979, is substantial orchestra music. And...

NR:

All of it, in fact.

ETZ:

And I think, well except for Leontyne Price, and I think it's been, it was perhaps something of a surprise to people in the music world that you're winning the Pulitzer Prize for an instrumental work...

NR:

Including to me, it was a surprise. Because...

ETZ:

How did you find to, by the way?

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NR:

In those days, nobody knew...it was really very, very tight, and I even now I don't know who was on the board. But I had...Jim was in Nantucket. He had gone that morning to Nantucket, and I had gone out and walked the streets and came home about eight in the evening, and the phone was ringing. And it was a music critic in Pittsburgh, I think, who said, "Can I be the first one to interview you?" And I said, "Well, for what?"

ETZ:

For what? Yes.

NR:

Yeah, and he said, "You won the Pulitzer Prize. And I said, "Well, wait a minute. There's a telegram under my door." And I went back, and I thought it was some joke [laughs] because, why me? I was so out of fashion, but it was. And I said, "Sure, interview me." And then I called Jim, and then I called my mother and father. Then it was in papers, so it was official. And then I...and then John Gruen interviewed me for the New York Times. But before he came, I wrote out the whole interview. I said everything I wanted to say, instead of his questions.

ETZ:

Mmm.

NR:

Including...

ETZ:

How does it feel?

NR:

How does it feel, and also about getting it for a non-vocal piece. In Carnegie Hall, I had one big vocal piece, period, performed, and that would have been just three or four years ago. I wasn't there. I had the flue...called Sun, S-u-n, with the American Composers Orchestra.

ETZ:

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Yes, that was in 1994.

NR:

Was it?

ETZ:

With Paul Dunkel...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Conducting ACO. It's interesting, in the 70s they still had telegrams, I guess instead of fax.

NR:

It was a telegram. Telegram doesn't exist today, does it?

ETZ:

I don't think so. I know I found out...I was just sitting at my desk writing and this...the phone rang and I answered it, and a man wanted background information on me. He said he was from UPI, and I said, "What do you mean?" And he said...spelled out my name, "Is this Ellen Zwilich, Z-w-i-l-i-c-h?" I said, yes. He said, "Oh, maybe you don't know. You won the Pulitzer Prize."

NR:

And what did you think?

ETZ:

I thought...well, first of all, I thought, Wow! you know, this is really wonderful. And then, as I'm talking to this man, I begin to think, do I know anybody this malicious, you know, that would call me and play this charade? And when I got just at the end of this interview, some neighbors of mine, whose son was on Wall Street, they rang the bell, and he had seen it through the ticker tape or something. But, the...and this was in '83, and they still didn't have a really kind of nice system of notifying you. And I did know I'd been nominated. You probably did, too.

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NR:

I didn't know. I didn't.

ETZ:

But, I didn't...

NR:

I didn't know. I hadn't the remotest notion.

ETZ:

I didn't go. I certainly didn't plan on it.

NR:

I felt that...

ETZ:

Do you think it, it helped you a great deal?

ETZ:

Yes I do, I thought...I have...my feeling was because of my wicked ways that I was automatically not up for a Pulitzer Prize. And I think that I believe...

ETZ:

Your wicked ways being writing...

NR:

Oh, writing...

ETZ:

Tonal music and...?

NR:

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No, writing diaries about myself and other people and not making any secret about the life that I led. I think Hugo Weisgal was on...he allowed me to believe that he coulda been on board.

ETZ:

Hmm.

NR:

I also think that my getting the Pulitzer was a sign of the change of weather in the world of tonal and non-tonal music. It definitely was, 'cause the year after somebody else unlikely won it, seems to me...several people and Del Tredici got it. Didn't he get one?

ETZ:

David...Yes I think...

NR:

I think he did, too.

ETZ:

I think he did. I don't really know. [to Robert, off-camera]: Do we have an almanac here?

Robert:

Hmm...

ETZ:

'Cause it's ...these things are listed in there. Robert, if you happen to find it, we would...

Robert:

Okay.

ETZ:

...be curious. [to NR]: In what ways do you feel that this was helpful to you, the Pulitzer Prize?

NR:

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It makes people have to take you seriously, whether they want to or not, for one thing. 'Cause it's magic words in America. 'Cause the money with it, it was nothing. It was a thousand dollars for me. It was...

ETZ:

Yeah, it was still a thousand when I got it. Its up now [chuckles].

NR:

But it's publicity for about a year, all over the place. And then it becomes history, and your name is all... "Ellen Zwilich, Pulitzer Prize winner, was arrested yesterday for jaywalking." [ETZ laughs.] But it's...you're always "Pulitzer Prize winner." And people say it in hushed tones when they introduce you for f...on a stage or something like that sort. And that way, I think it's...I'm glad for my mother and father, too, because they...

ETZ:

Because my mother enjoyed it very much, too.

NR:

It makes a difference. They've invested in you, and it vindicates the weirdness of being composer to the outside world.

ETZ:

And your parents were still alive in '75.

NR:

Definitely. They died rather recently in their nineties. Father would have been a hundred last year, and Mother, in get late nineties. They both died about ten years ago.

ETZ:

And they followed your career up...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...to this point.

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NR:

Father was very, very, very, very proud of me.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And I'm so glad.

ETZ:

It's very nice, yeah.

NR:

He once said, I don't remember, but he said, he said that I said, "I'm gonna be...I am a composer." Not "I'm gonna be a composer." "I am a composer."

ETZ:

I am a composer.

NR:

And then he said, apparently, "Well, how do you think you're going to make a living?" And apparently I said, "I don't care how I make a living as long as I have enough to eat and sleep...in other words, I don't want to be a 'My son the doctor,' or a lawyer or Wall Street, and Father was impressed by that. It was such an un-American answer. And he was helpful to me financially. He gave me an allowance, and they didn't have that kind of money. But, and then when I started supporting myself doing what I wanted to do without making concessions, they...he was impressed.

ETZ:

Hmm.

NR:

But it's a, it's a modest life compared to, uh, Itzhak Perlman.

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ETZ:

Well, it's a rich life, I feel...

NR:

It's a modest life financially, is what I mean.

ETZ:

That, you know, to be able to...I feel like a very rich person to be able to do what I...

NR:

But that's metaphoric. I'm talking about money.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

And people worry about their children just getting along in the world...

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

...without being evicted.

ETZ:

I sometimes feel that things like, you know, the Pulitzer Prize and various kinds of recognition, they mean something to you, sort of, in relation to what they mean to other people, like the parents who will say...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Gee, it was worth it. Or...

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NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...she was right after all, or he was right after all to do this. Or the people who have believed in you over the years,

NR:

So it's a symbol.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

Because a lot of people...I'm sure there are people you feel don't deserve it, and others who should have it who haven't had it. So it is a symbol, like Academy Awards.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And then, of course, the prize doesn't always go to the best work of that person. It has to be a work that was performed within the year.

ETZ:

Yes.

NR:

In my case, I think Air Music is a good piece. But I think I deserved the Prize, too, as well as that particular work.

ETZ:

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Hmm. We have a whole series of...[to Camera operator] excuse me, Nick...a whole series of performances following this. In 1977, the North Carolina Symphony did Assembly...

NR:

In '76, I think. That was called Assembly in Fall.

ETZ:

Assembly in Fall.
[Off-camera voices, unintelligible]

ETZ:

Is there anything you would like to say about that one?

NR:

They asked me to write a piece that would be sizable, and I wrote it. At the same...it often happens with me...does it happen with you?...that I'll write two pieces of exactly the same kind at the...one following the other. For example, when I wrote Day Music for violin and piano, then I got another commission to write another piece for violin and piano. So I wrote Night Music. Although I did wri...said everything I had to say for violin, but then I hadn't. Same with my...with those two recent string quartets. And I'd like to write another one now. Here, I had already written Air Music, and then Gosling of North Carolina asked me to write a piece, so I wrote a piece quite different in...it's in one long movement of a half an hour, about. It's an imperfect, but interesting piece with four soloists: a trumpet, a viola, a timpani player, and... what else is there? Oboe...

ETZ:

Hmm.

NR:

...trumpet, oboe, timpani player, and I'm leaving some...and a fourth instrument...I forget what, though.

ETZ:

And this was first performed...this was the New York premiere, and this was in March of '97 [1977].

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NR:

Yeah, it was first performed twice in North Carolina, in two different towns, and then it was done in Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

Following this, there was another Leontyne Price performance in Carnegie Hall?

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Two Songs, then the American Symphony in 1983 did your Piano Concerto in Six Movements.

NR:

With a woman named Rita Bouboulidi, who was just awful.

ETZ:

Really?

NR:

Yeah, she...I mean the piece is published, so anyone has a right to do it, and she called me again just a few weeks ago. She's not a real pianist. She's got rich friends or something like that. And when I went to hear her play it at her house, the fast movements were twice as slow as they should be. And I said, "Look, this is twice as slow." And she said, "Well, you don't realize how beautiful your music is, and you mustn't rush through it."
[NR and ETZ laugh]

ETZ:

Oh gosh!

NR:

So, that kind of thing, and it may be because her fingers didn't work that fast. She still wants me to recommend her for things, which I won't do.

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ETZ:

This is Mosche Atzman. I don't think I...

NR:

Yeah, he was a nice man from Israel, and he conducted it.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And he got stuck with her.

ETZ:

You know, I was in the American Symphony under Stokowski...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...for seven years, and that was a very important part of my life. But I was out long before this, and, so I didn't have the pleasure of this.

NR:

Then Jerry Lowenthal played the same piece...

ETZ:

Oh, well then...

NR:

...wonderfully...

ETZ:

Yes.

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NR:

...about four months later with the Composer's Orchestra. And he...it was written for him, and he's recorded this rather fu...

ETZ:

Here?

NR:

No, in Tully Hall.

ETZ:

Oh, oh, okay.

NR:

I think...

ETZ:

Oh, that's right, they were playing in Alice Tully Hall in those days.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

Now I remember.

NR:

And it's his piece, and he plays the hell out of it.

ETZ:

Oh, he's a terrific pianist. Then in '84, we have Leontyne Price doing Snake. There's a bunch of Recital Hall stuff, including, in '85, Marc-Andre Hamelin did your Etudes. Let me see if that's it...nope...

NR:

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That's what somebody told me. Was it you, recently?

ETZ:

Yes, I read it to you from the list that we have. It's hard to find these things here. At any rate, Marc must have played this as a part of the competition that was...yeah, here it is: The Finals of the 1985 Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition for Pianists. And Marc played your piece along with Davidovsky...

NR:

Did he play all of the etudes or just one of them?

ETZ:

He played Etude No. 1 from the Eight Etudes. Those are the pieces that I know.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

Right? He did a piece by Davidovsky, you, John Cage, Scriabin, and the Concord Sonata of Ives. And, an interesting thing about this is that Marc won this competition. And a part of the prize, Carnegie Hall, the Detroit Symphony, and ASOL - the American Symphony Orchestra League - commissioned me to write a piano concerto for the person who would win this. So not too long after this, in fact the next summer, Marc-Andre Hammelin did the world premiere of my Piano Concerto.

NR:

Which I have never heard and would love to hear.

ETZ:

Oh, we have to do a...

NR:

I'd love to hear it.

ETZ:

...an eshte [?] one of these days.

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NR:

Yeah, okay.

ETZ:

So we were connected in this way. [break in tape]

ETZ:

...he won this, which was very, very, very unusual...very young. Fine, French-Canadian, young pianist. We have a performance in '86 of Robert Shaw leading the String Symphony.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

[singing] Here we go...I think. We'll, we'll save this. That's with the Atlanta Symphony.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Remember that performance?

NR:

Yeah. I remember it.

ETZ:

Shaw is still very much around and with us, and...

NR" I know he is. I remember before that performance we went to a restaurant across the street from Carnegie.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

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NR:

And Bing was there, but he was quite gaga.

ETZ:

Oh, Fontana de Trevi, probably...

NR:

Coulda been. Right across the street.

ETZ:

Yeah, the Italian...

NR:

And I was with about six, six or eight people. And Bing was...didn't know...remember if he had paid the check or not. He was Alzheimer-ish. I love Shaw. I think he's...

ETZ:

In '86 already, I, gee that's...

NR:

Struck me. I didn't ever...

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

That's not so long ago.

ETZ:

Ten years ago.

NR:

Yeah.

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ETZ:

The last time I saw Bing he was sort of, like, wandering around at Avery Fisher Hall...

NR:

Yeah, yeah...

ETZ:

...at a performance. I don't think he knew where he was or why or...It's a sad, sad case. But Shaw, you were speaking of Shaw...he's such a wonderful musician.

NR:

Yeah. I had heard him perform things back in the 40s with the Collegiate Chorale, and it was always...and also at Tanglewood in the summer of '46 he was there, and I went to some of his rehearsals. And I never knew him at all, but he was quite magical and seductive in the way he could deal with a...with choruses and make them do things which seem to me the right things.

ETZ:

Did you go to Tanglewood?

NR:

Yes, in the summer of '46 and '47. Those were idyllic summers.

ETZ:

And...

NR:

Tanglew...

ETZ:

...Bernstein was there, and Copland.

NR:

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'46 was the first year it opened after the war. It had been closed in '40. And they did Peter Grimes in '46. Britten came for it. And Lenny was all over the place, and he conducted it. And this summer...

ETZ:

Wow.

NR:

...fifty years later, they're gonna do a big...they're doing it again.

ETZ:

Yes.

NR:

So, I was with Copland as well as five other people. And the other composer was...

ETZ:

Lukas [Foss], wasn't he there?

NR:

No, Lukas was around, but he was not there in any teaching facility. There's always a guest composer, and this first summer it was Honegger. But Honegger...no, it was Martinu. And Martinu had an acc...fell off of a barricade at Barrington, where...he lived in the same house that several of us lived in, too...and so he had to go to the hospital. So he was...he was substituted by Lipatnikov. The next summer, the same thing happened. Honegger had a heart attack, so Sam Barber took over where Honegger...

ETZ:

Hmm.

NR:

But both summers, I was with Copland. I learned quite a bit, mainly not from...

ETZ:

You say you were with him. You mean you studied with him...?

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NR:

I was one of...

ETZ:

...showed him your material?

NR:

...one of his six classes. And we had two lessons a week, and then there were also two meetings a week with all the...all sixteen composers who were guest flock...

ETZ:

What was it like studying with Copland?

NR:

I learned more from the classes than from the one-to-one thing.

ETZ:

The...the master classes where everybody was showing music, and...

NR:

Yeah, because the master classes would be on different things. One time it was on movie music, and he would lecture us about how you write movie scores and what you do when and how it's done. And that was very, very interesting.

ETZ:

Oh, that is.

NR:

And I still remember it.

ETZ:

I remember him saying...when I was at Juilliard, he came and did a sort of master class...and I remember him saying about the movie, Washington Square...

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NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

...that that scene, that horribly sad recognition scene where she goes to the window...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And the carriage is coming, and it passes.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

He said that the first time they screened this...

NR:

People laughed, yeah.

ETZ:

...the audience laughed. Then he changed the scoring, and then it became the dramatic moment.

NR:

It's 'cause...music never means anything specific. The movie makes it mean...gives it different meanings.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

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So music can...any music works for any scene, but it can make a scene ridiculous, or it can make air seem tragic or what all. When I did the one movie I did years later, everything Copland wrote came back to me...about how they use a click track of this sort, and you look...you can see the movie in your home over and over again...

ETZ:

A moviola, sort of...

NR:

And moviolas.

ETZ:

What score did you do, Ned? I don't know.

NR:

They threw it all out after I finished, which they usually do with most scores. It was...[ETZ gasps]...they didn't use any music. It didn't need music, anyway. It was a documentary type of movie. It was called Panic in Needle Park...

ETZ:

Oh, I remember that title at least. I don't think I...

NR:

...which Al Pacino was...it's his first movie. And a girl named Kitty Winn. And the director was Faye Dunaway's lover, named Jerry Schatzberg. And the producer was Dominick Dunne, who just wrote a...who was just the official CBS commentator on the...that murder out in California.

ETZ:

Mmm. You were engaged to write the score..,

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...for this movie, and then they just didn't use it, or...?

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NR:

Yeah. It's..it's kind of weird too. You...I wore it for eleven instruments. Then they get eleven union musicians who are crack sight-readers. Then you all meet. I did, let's say , thirty-two cues. One was three seconds long, one was four minutes long, especially for the titles, which was was most important. Another was about three minutes long. And you finish it, and you confer a great deal with the director. Then the great day comes, and you get the crack sight readers. I remember Paul Jacobs was the pianist. [ETZ chuckles] and they read it through. Then they record it. Then they put down their instruments. Then a screen is lowered in which you see a black-and-white version of the music...of the images against which the music is supposed to...illustrate. And all of these tough producer types, who don't know nothing, except they know they can...

ETZ:

They know what they like...

NR:

...look at the damn thing [laughs], and then that's pulled up again. Then we rehearse the next section. And I still... I thought it worked fine for some of the sections, and I thought it was...

ETZ:

Too present?

NR:

Glamorous, in a way for oth... it sort of took away from...stark horror of some of the movie. I remember that Auric wrote the music for Topkapi...is that it? Do you remember that movie? About a Greek theft in a museum. And there's a scene that lasts about twenty...

ETZ:

In Turkey, yes?

NR:

...a scene of twenty minutes where the thief is lowered simply by upside-down, with his mouth opens something or other...

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ETZ:

I saw that movie, yes.

NR:

...and takes...and Auric had written...

ETZ:

Set in Topkapi, supposedly, in Istanbul.

NR:

...terrific music for all that, and then the cinema-maker - he's American - married to Melina Mercouri...what's his name? - said to Auric, "I'm going to show you the movie again twice, once with your music, and once without it. And if you want us to use music, we will." And Auric realized his music ruined the horrible silence where a pin-drop could mean that there's a guard coming, or something like that. Anyway, I did that. And Copland' classes were informative. And sometimes he would have all of us orchestrate the same twelve measures from a piece of his, and then we would compare it, and that kind of thing.

ETZ:

That's interesting.

NR:

On the one-to-one situation with him, I don't remember as well...as the classes.

ETZ:

What did he do? Just look at your music and...

NR:

Yeah...and he was...what he did was say what Nadia Boulanger would have said, "There's too many notes."

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

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NR:

I can't remember, sort of...I wrote a little opera and played it...sang it for him, fool that I was. [ETZ chuckles] And various other pieces. He and I got along fine. I liked him very, very much as a person and missed him, and still do, when he died. I never knew quite what he thought of my music, ever, and...

ETZ:

Do you think that's a good thing from a teacher?

NR:

To not know?

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

I don't know. I don't know quite what teaching is.

ETZ:

How do you teach composition? I know that you do. How do you approach it?

NR:

Well, I've done it. The first time I did it was at Buffalo in 1959, and they offered me a job, and...with a salary. Leon Kirchner just had it, and it was a generous thing. And I'd never, ever in my life had...I had a Social Security number because I had played the piano for Martha Graham when I was twenty years old. And I had to get my cer...but I had never taught anybody anything. I sort of did as a prac...when I was...but I never had a responsible salary job ever. And it was understood that I would write...I would give six public lectures, for Christ's sake, each accompanied by a concert of my own devising at Buffalo. So it was a major...plus teaching. I wrote the lectures the summer before about... I said, "What do I know?" I mean, I know all about music, exc...I know how to write music, but I don't know how to write about writing music. But I gave...then I wrote a speech called Writing Songs...How You Write a Song. In other words, practical things.

ETZ:

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Mmm-hmm.

NR:

Another one called, Song and Singer: What's the Relation? Another one about answering questions composers always hear, like, "Do you hear all those notes in your head?" called Four Questions Answered. And another one on, "Is New Music New? - What's So New About New Music," and so on. And when I realized people would listen to me - 'cause I'd just written diaries before that, and here was writing about things other than my own navel. About teaching, I had six or seven students who ha... I took them whether I wanted to or not. I liked all of them. And I also had a class with...in which I would have them all set the same poem to music or something of that sort. But again I said to myself, What do I know about teaching? and I still say it. Is there such a thing as teaching musical composition? You can teach orchestration. It's a craft. And if...I think David Diamond teaches composition as a craft, too. And I think he's probably right. He's got more patience than I in making people write fu...

ETZ:

Well, he teaches fugue, and...things like that.

NR:

He teaches fugue, and he teaches all kinds of things, and I'm too lazy for that. I'd rather have them take it, fugue, from somebody else down the hall. And I feel a little less...I still feel responsible, but a little less academic than I used to think, now.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And I still assign them to do things and solve it...solve it as best they can. And then what you do is they bring it to you. You tell why you don't think it's...it works. Or why it does work, 'cause you have to compliment them, always. I...they all wrote operas in the past six months, which were then done at Curtis.

ETZ:

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Do you let them know...you were speaking of Copland where you were never quite sure...do you give them verbal encouragement, like "I think you're on the right track" or things like this or just...

NR:

I sometimes say, "I think you're on the wrong track. Why don't we scrap this whole thing and do another kind of piece? Because this just isn't right." I'll tell them, and I'll even tell them after four years a piece can be...is a dud. And they...we've all...get off on the wrong foot sometimes. And then I'll say, "Let's not do this. I'm not interested myself in it, so let's do something else." I...it's had to a ...I ask myself the same question every day, How do you teach it? And also I've had some students at Curtis, where I've been now for nearly fifteen years, who of the maybe twenty-five people I've had since I've been there, two or three have been hopeless from the beginning, And since I chose them...they're admitted, and it's scholarship...I do feel a little responsible for...about all that.

ETZ:

What do you do?

NR:

I...you keep them on, and maybe they'll drop out of their own accord.

ETZ:

Hmm. Back to our log here; there's really so much to cover. I have American Symphony with Serebrier doing a piece called Frolic.

NR:

I didn't hear that.

ETZ:

Does that ring any bells?

NR:

I know the piece. [ETZ chuckles] It was a piece written for, I think it was a piece written for the Houston Orchestra who commissioned everybody to write fanfares of some sort...

ETZ:

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Oh, yes.

NR:

But I wrote a...about three-minute piece, called it Frolic.

ETZ:

Then we have...something very important to the history of Carnegie Hall. We have the premiere of your Spring Music by the Beaux Arts Trio in February of 1991.

NR:

Well, yeah. Carnegie commissioned that, didn't they?

ETZ:

Carnegie Hall did commission this.

NR:

And I was all pleased because I had written...never written a trio. I've written two other trios...three other trios, but never for standard combination.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm...

NR:

One was for voice, clarinet and piano. Another was for cello, piano and flute. And another was for clarinet, violin and piano. And this is in a real trio.

ETZ:

[to camera operator] Nick, you wanna, you wanna get a little of this?

Camera operator: Oh, excuse me [indiscernable].

NR:

Can you play any of it as background or something?

ETZ:

When you say a, when you say in a real trio, you mean...

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NR:

I mean a standard form.

ETZ:

...you mean a standard piano trio.

NR:

I...of course, this is more fun than writing it for three strings. But if someone asked me to do it for three strings, I'd do that too. You could play this...play it as background music. There's a pretty good CD of it.

ETZ:

The Toccata, yeah.

NR:

The recording is by a different violinist than the one who played it on the world premiere, because Ida Kavafian is now the violinist, and she's very good.

ETZ:

Izzy Cohen was still the violinist...

NR:

He was, yes.

ETZ:

It was Isadore Cohen, Menachem Pressler, pianist, and Peter Wiley, cello. And the Beaux Arts now has...

NR:

I also...

ETZ:

...Ida Kavafian as their violinist.

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NR:

Yes, she's good.

ETZ:

She's wonderful.

NR:

They're all good.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

Pressler's terrific.

ETZ:

Excellent.

NR:

And incidentally, the cellist is the cellist who played...who was the soloist in Remembering Tommy in Cincinnati.

ETZ:

Oh, Peter.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

Peter Wiley, oh.

NR:

Yep, mmm-hmm. And the pianist was Lee Luvisi.

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ETZ:

Yes, yes, sure.

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Was Peter in the Cincinnati Symphony, or...

NR:

Yes, he was cel...he was the first cellist.

ETZ:

Principal cellist...

NR:

They got him instead of this woman who died, because she was dead.

ETZ:

That's a good reason...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...not to engage her, I guess [chuckles]. Yes, I was at this performance.

NR:

Were you?

ETZ:

I remember this. Yes, this was a...

NR:

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But we didn't know each other especially then, did we?

ETZ:

Umm...yes. We did.

NR:

How long ago was that?

ETZ:

This was in '91.

NR:

Oh, we knew each other then.

ETZ:

This was the centennial...cause we really got acquainted at Santa Fe Chamber Music.

NR:

Was that in '90?

ETZ:

Which was in 1990.

NR:

God, time flies.

ETZ:

I know. It's amazing isn't it.

NR:

I made another note: the only time I ever played the piano in Carnegie Hall...

ETZ:

Yes, you must, you must share this with us, if you...

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NR:

...was an encore with Judy Collins, and I brought the program. Since I'm not on the program, I had to bring the review of it that said I was...just so you don't think I'm lying.

ETZ:

Oh, we don't think you're lying.

NR:

Judy Collins, looking a lot older than this, gave a concert on December 8, 1988. And I wrote, I played Early in the Morning and A Christmas Carol. Toot , toot. And the review by Stephen Holden, who was just beginning to review in that said, "stylistic breadth that ran from Ned Rorem's lovely setting of a Robert Hillier poem, with the composer in the...at the piano - to Bob Dylan's Like a Rolling Stone." So there. [ETZ laughs] I don't think I've ever played there before in any form or shape.

ETZ:

How did you feel, standing on the...or sitting on the stage. It's...

NR:

I didn't say, I'm...here's Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

I said, does this audience have the remotest idea who a composer is?

ETZ:

[laughing] Who am I and what am I doing...

NR:

With, yeah, with Judy, who is a pop star. With whom I'm on a program tomorrow night, as a matter of fact. You wanna come? At Jim's church?

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ETZ:

I don't think I can.

NR:

Yeah, I don't think you...

ETZ:

What's the date?

NR:

It's a fundraising concert for...last about an hour.

ETZ:

Yeah, no. I wouldn't be able to come tomorrow night.

NR:

I got Judy to sing...

ETZ:

That's very nice.

NR:

...Amazing Grace at the end.

ETZ:

What time is it, Ned?

NR:

And Angelina's going to sing, too.

ETZ:

Oh.

NR:

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In fact, I'm...a lot of little black girls who hate white people are gonna sing some stuff.

ETZ:

I will call you later because we probably ought to go. I'd love to hear her again.

NRL Well, Angelina is one of four singers who are going to stand up in a row and sing twenty minutes of my songs. Then Jim will have...and then there are some other soloists doing cabaret kind of stuff.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

ETZ:

Okay, I don't have my book with me. I think we have something, but maybe I can move it around, or...Ned, another fairly recent, but moving along this chronology of performance is the Curtis Orchestra.

NR:

Oh yeah.

ETZ:

Andre Previn conducting and Gary Graffman playing your Concerto for the Left Hand.

NR:

I loved that.

ETZ:

I didn't hear this performance, but I've heard the CD, and...

NR:

It's a good piece.

ETZ:

It's a terrific piece.

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NR:

And let me see, Gary Graffman, whom I've known since he was just a little brat at Curtis [ETZ chuckles] wearing short pants. He's about five years younger than me, is now, as you know, the director of the Curtis Institute of Music, and he only plays with his left hand. And so I wrote...he asked me to write a concerto for him, and I said, "I will," knowing that a major conductor or a reputed conductor would be conducting it, and they would both do it in Philadelphia, at the Academy, and in New York. And so I wrote a piece which I think is a pretty good piece. And Gary plays the, he...plays it, just...I can't think of a better performance.

ETZ:

The recording is certainly strong.

NR:

I made a very terrible gaffe, just like the gaffe I made with Robert Shaw and the Louisville Orch...the Atlanta Orchestra. Before I went to Atlanta, they...I was interviewed on the rad...on the telephone by somebody, and I said to this person, "The South is a very mysterious place for me. And if I'm on a bus in New York, and somebody with a heavy Southern accent is saying anything, something intelligent, I'm always surprised. Just as I'm surprised when people with English accents say something stupid."

ETZ:

Oh...

NR:

They printed this. Somebody in the orchestra took it out of the newspaper, circled that rearm in red, and put on the bulletin board backstage for everybody to read.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm. And they welcomed you with open arms, no doubt.

NR:

They welcomed me with open arms in any case [ETZ laughs] but at Curtis, before I went to the first rehearsal, I did a similar interview, and I said to the interviewer, who then put it

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in the paper, I said, "It's marvelous to have this student orchestra. They play just like the Philadelphia Orchestra. And, of course, it's like slave labor."

[NR and ETZ laugh]

NR:

And they were not amused. And before this rehearsal, the final rehearsal, I was going to...everyone took me into a private office, said with serious, unsmiling faces, "Ned, you've got to...you've got to apologize." And so I went out beforehand and...

ETZ:

And spoke to the slaves.

NR:

I said, "Look, you're the best performers in the entire world. I don't like to apologize, but I'll apologize. I think you're great. I was wrong. You're right. I'm at your feet and please forgive me. And now I'll shut up." And then Previn [ETZ chuckles] accompanied it, I guess is the word, but he made it sound really very good. But is it him, or is it the orchestra? It's these children who are under twenty, mostly.

ETZ:

Yes, some of the Juilliard Orchestra is also extraordinary.

NR:

And the Juilliard Orchestra, and they can play as good as anybody else.

ETZ:

Yeah

NR:

And they're...

ETZ:

And they're slave labor [laughs].

NR:

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...and every one of them is a soloist, but every one of them...but they can also play together.

ETZ:

Yep. Well...

NR:

Which is fine, 'cause most of them are going to end up with orchestras anyway, rather than being soloists. And then the following night...

ETZ:

Yes...

NR:

...they played it in the Academy in Philly, and the following night they played it in Carnegie Hall. And I felt good about that.

ETZ:

It's interesting how, you know, you mention the accompanying...that has kind of a negative connotation, but it seems to me that it's a very strong test of a conductor whether they can really...

NR:

I'm sorry, I'm so awful.

ETZ:

...collaborate with...

Off-camera person: It's alright.

ETZ:

...a soloist in a concerto.

NR:

I think the word "accompanist" is a very noble word.

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ETZ:

I do. Yes, I do too.

NR:

A singer...

ETZ:

I don't think it should have the connotation...

NR:

A singer and the pianist accompany...she's an accompanist or he's an accompanist of the pianist, who they accompany each other through the adventure of a song.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And they help each other out.

ETZ:

But that's a very...I think it's a gift to begin with.

NR:

Yes.

ETZ:

A comp...a conductor to be able to do it, and it's also cultivated. And not everybody can do it.

NR:

I like with pianists, for example, with singers, I like an accompanist...when I accompany, and I'm pretty good if I practice, I like the lid full open.

ETZ:

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Mmm-hmm.

NR:

I think it looks nice, and it throws the singer's voice out to the audience. And I would rather play down with the lid up than play up with the lid down.

ETZ:

Yes.

NR:

And if, as soon as you can convince singers of that, they'll say okay.

ETZ:

I'm a lid up person myself. Finally we have a program of the Philadelphia Orchestra doing Eagles, but now we're in 1993. And it's really quite stunning when you were recalling that early...

NR:

Oh, that awful man...

ETZ:

Sawallisch!

NR:

He...I think he's a horrible man, but he's a very good conductor. It's...

ETZ:

I don't know him.

NR:

It's like Edo De Waart. I think he had to play Air Music in California, because it was agreed for a consortium or something like that. And I...somebody sent me a tape from San Francisco, and I wrote him a letter and said, "This is...you're divine!" He never answered the letter. Then a few years later, he conducted the Remembering Tommy piece in Phil...Aspen. And I didn't meet him until I came out to take a bow. And then in the green room I said, "I loved your performance." He sort of went "Hmpf" and turned his back. But

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everyone has told me he likes women more than men. He's been married many times, but I thought...and then he's Dutch. [to Camera Operator]: Are you Dutch? [to ETZ]: And the Dutch don't know quite how to behave at all occasions. And Sawallisch is is much worse. 'Cause I was asked to come a day early to Philadelphia, and Sawallisch was going to do my piece...

ETZ:

Here's a picture of Sawallisch.

NR:

Well, I'll be...yeah, he's just like his picture - self-important.

ETZ:

Don't make me laugh, I'll move the picture.

NR:

I didn't meet him. I said to the woman who runs the orchestra, "Please give me ten minutes with him before..." But he, I didn't meet him 'til he's about to go out on the stage. And he said, "Oh, oh, Rorem, will you go out front and listen?" After he played my piece, I came up to the apron of the stage and said, "It's terrific. I want to make...just tell you a couple things." He said, "Well, make it snappy because we're..." That, I'm...it's not gracious. And after it was played I went with my sister backstage, just to say, "How nice," but I was clearly infringing on his precious time. I might add that, sort of the high...Perlman was on the same program. And I had said to myself in New York, "Since I will be seeing Perlman in person, I'm not gonna press the point here." Before the rehearsal, I went back to Perlman's dressing room. There was somebody doing an interview. I said, "Can I see you alone for a minute." And he said, "Oh, I know what it's all about." And he got rid of the person.

ETZ:

This was about the air conditioner?

NR:

He said, "I know what it's about. I'm going to do everything I can. We'll really do everything." And he did.

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ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

He was decent about it.

ETZ:

Well, that's nice.

NR:

But Sawallisch treated me like a composer, and he treated what's-his-name...Perlman, like a performer. And you can see where their...what's the word?...their priorities lie. The composer is non-essential, but the performer is not. And I...it was so transparent that... I do not like him. I also, then, just to be nice, gave him a pr...a gift of a signed one of my books, which he never acknowledged. So...and he's got secretaries who could do those sort of things. So, off with his head, I say! The performance was very good. I'm not like you, Ellen. You're very good with people, especially conductors, but I don't...I don't know, except for Lenny Bernstein and a couple of other, much less famous conductors. I don't know how to talk to them. I've never known how to talk to a conductor, and they are absolute monarchs. In the green room, everyone's backstage trying to think of the right thing to say and buttering them up. And the conductor's wife is always there, looking stoical when women are...when he's flirting with women, which he always is, including you, I'm sure. Most of the conductors.

ETZ:

Oh, I'm a little, I'm a little ol...

NR:

I shot at that one quickly.
[NR and ETZ laugh.]

NR:

It's a whole breed unto itself, and I see this a Curtis, in the student conductors, age twenty, who are students of...it's a German man. Very early they get...they have to get it because they had to...they have to lord it over these people. They are absolute monarchs,

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and if they aren't, the rehearsal is not an orderly affair. But they get this imperious notion of themselves pretty early. Maybe they're right, maybe they're wrong. Stokowski, who did two of my pieces, gorgeously...

ETZ:

What did he do?

NR:

He did...the first time he ever performed with the Boston Symphony, ever, he did Eagles, which, again, I heard on the radio.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

I have a tape of it. And later he did a piece called Pilgrims, for strings. He never asked me to be...I never even met him...he never asked me to be...I met him, yes, in Paris, once at Jean Stein's, at a party. She was a friend of Gloria Vanderbilt's, and Gloria had asked Stokowski, who was coming to Paris alone, to look up Jean, which would have been in 1953. And I said hi, or something like that, but he wouldn't have remembered. I like him very much for having done my pieces that were neither world premieres, nor was he... nor did he want me to come and take a bow. He did them 'cause he liked the pieces. And that's how things should be done.

ETZ:

Yeah, and he believed, you know. I played for him for seven years...

NR:

Yes, and how did you find him?

ETZ:

...in the American Symphony, and in retrospect, it was an incredible education, because not only did we have him, but we had Ansermet and Eugen Jochum and Karl Bohm and Aram Katchaturian and, I mean just, on and on as guest conductors.

NR:

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As guest cond...

ETZ:

So it was just a real laboratory for me as a young composer. I was violinist in the symphony, in the American Symphony, but I was always, you know, a composer. I found Stokowski to be, at the time, he was a difficult man. He was very imperious, and he had to be addresses as Maestro, and, you know, he sort of hired and fired at will, and not always the right people. But I kind of regarded him and a couple of other people I've known in my life as a connection, as a connection to an older tradition which I think still has a lot of meaning. It's interesting that the music world is sort of coming back around to this kind of freer, more romantic approach to ...

NR:

I'm not against it.

ETZ:

Nor am I. I think when he knew something very well, he was just really wonderful at it. And I still remember certain performances as, just –

NR:

Could you have played with him when he did Pilgrims? I think it wa – I wasn't there. And after he – 'cause I think that was the same night Leontyne sang something of mine, but after he played my piece, he motioned for me to take a bow, assuming I was in the audience. And people – friends told me later, he just went, "Well." Shrugged his shoulders – "If the composer doesn't want to come, to hell with him."

ETZ:

Yes ...

NR:

Gloria, since this is videotape for history, I think its int – [break in tape]

ETZ:

I wasn't in the orchestra.

NR:

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19...in 1972, he did Pilgrims, for strings.

ETZ:

Okay...and I was there.

NR:

Were you in the orchestra?

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

It's a sh...it's about a six-minute piece.

ETZ:

And you didn't show up, or...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

When he...[chuckles]

NR:

And was that in Town Hall? Could it have been in Town Hall?

ETZ:

It would have had to be either here, at Carnegie Hall, or...

NR:

You played the trumpet.

ETZ:

No, violin.

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NR:

Violin.

ETZ:

I played the trumpet long ago.

NR:

Well, then you played this. There are two violin solos in that piece, playing trills, but they're not the first and second. They're the seventeenth and eighteenth. They're way in the back.

ETZ:

Yeah...

NR:

Anyway, Gloria Vanderbilt is a friend of mine. I'm not...don't mean to drop her name, but she was married to Stokowski, as you know.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

She was under twenty when they got married, and she...he was the second of her four husbands. And they were married about eight years. And I said to her, finally, 'cause she's not especially musical, but she led a very...went to all his rehearsals and things and I said, "Why did you get divorced? What was he like?" And she said, "We got di..." She said, "I divorced him 'cause I never really knew him. I don't know what he was like."

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

And I can...I know what she's saying.

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ETZ:

I can understand that. I mean, you know...

NR:

And they had two sons. And the oldest son, to whom I just gave a tape of Eagles a few years ago, so well bred. He's in his late forties now, handsome. The youngest son committed suicide about, or rather, he died right in front of his mother...it's horrible... jumped out the window five or six years ago.

ETZ:

Oh. That's terrible.

NR; So of her four boys, on...she's only got two left. 'Cause another one, by another marriage, just vanished and said, "I hate you all." And the lawyer sends checks to a certain box number in a...someplace, but they haven't been able to retrieve him.

ETZ:

Terrible.

NR:

Anyway, Stokowski, when I, when I met him another time with Virgil after he played a Virgil...and I said, went backstage to see Virgil, and Stokowski was there, and I said, "Hi , I'm Ned Rorem, and you've done my pieces." And I said, "You did Eagles so beautifully. And all he did was go [gesturing] flap his arms like an eagle. That was...that's his conversation.

ETZ:

That was...that was warm.

NR:

But I would have liked to say, "How was...what was Greta Garbo like?"

ETZ:

You'd be better asking Greta Garbo what he was like, 'cause I...as I said, I worked with him for seven years in rehearsals and performances, and...

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NR:

Well, w...

ETZ:

...he was not really that knowable a person. But what I want to say about him is that the thing that I admire so much, particularly in retrospect, is that he really did believe in contemporary music.

NR:

He most certainly did.

ETZ:

This didn't mean that he always learned the music or that he did it extremely well...

NR:

He did Wozzeck in America for the first time.

ETZ:

Oh, I know. He did...

NR:

And he could have done Le Sacre for the first time, of Stravinsky, and many, many, many other European masterpieces...

ETZ:

But, the, but...

NR:

...in the teens and the twenties.

ETZ:

Also, it was sort of a philosophy that when you have a program of music, you have a contemporary piece on it. Unless it's, you know, a Boito Mephistophele or something like that.

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NR:

And a lot of the education I was talking about before I specialized in music, at home, were Stokowski records. He made records of Afternoon of a Faun three times, the flute getting ever more tenuous in that opening. So he finally stretched it out like taffy with those triplets.

ETZ:

I played that with him, and I just thought his performance of that was one of those things that I...

NR:

Yeah. So sensual, yeah.

ETZ:

Really, very sensual, and all these, you know, really slurpy slides in the violins...and very, very Romantic sort of approach to the music.

NR:

Yes. And then he...we...then he was considered vulgar.

ETZ:

Yes.

NR:

But...we should be so vulgar, vulgar with those wonderful sounds...

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

...like Andre Kostelanetz, too. Virgil...

ETZ:

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And also he had a, just the way he brought [gesturing] his hands down when conducting. He had a way of making the orchestra sound, sort of warm, resonant, glorious sound.

NR:

I remember Virgil was one of his guest conductors with his student orchestra. [to off-camera person]: I'm sorry.

Other person: It's OK.

NR:

And as Virgil's copyist, I had to go and correct mistakes and stuff. And Virgil was very sure of himself about everything except as a conductor. And when he was a conductor...

ETZ:

Yeah, that's reasonable.

NR:

...because he was insecure, he was very imperious.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

And so Virgil was up there conducting these...the Mayor LaGuardia Waltzes, they were called. And Stokowski, meanwhile, [softly] walked amongst the orchestra as he did [places hand to ear] and did this sort of thing. And Virgil was saying [yelling] "SOFTER, GODDAMMIT! CAN'T YOU PLAY SOFTER? Stoki, how can they...how can you make them play softer?" And Stokowski simply went to the orchestra, [whispering] "Soft." [ETZ laughs] And they played softer [NR chuckles].

ETZ:

That's funny.

NR:

What a...what a cond...I'm, I'm asking you, isn't...

ETZ:

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You know, you said something...excuse me, you said something very interesting th... about Virgil. You said, because he was insecure, he was very imperious.

NR:

Yes. Like my landlord, now.

ETZ:

Do you think sometimes that one of the problems a performer, or particularly, maybe, a conductor has with a living composer, us not having the grace to be dead already, where they didn't have to face us? But it, it might be very different for many conductors to have their neck on the block in the sense of having the composer who wrote the music sitting there listening to it.

NR:

The situation is different.

ETZ:

And I think it's...

NR:

It depends if it is a premiere. If it's the first time...the first time, then a composer is almost as innocent as the conductor. If it's an orchestra piece. I remember, for example, with Zinman, I orchestrated a piece called...about eight organ pieces, and Gerald Schwartz' wife had a miscarriage. So Zinman was to do the premiere and had to learn them in two days. And I'd never heard the piece. And I went to see him in his hotel. His son was there. He knew the score backwards by heart, much better than I did.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

So all he wanted to know, "Should this be...I just want to set the tempos," said he. And he ca...and it was perfect. In a way, they know their business better than we know the business, unless we happen to be conductors also. With singers, if I do what's called a master class of my songs, they're all songs I've heard a million times. Plus, the singer assumes that the composer knows what he wants, which a composer doesn't always

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know. And with singers especially, there is a much bigger difference between the male singer and this female singer than there is between two oboists or two pianists.

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

Women are women, and men are men. I...and so I'll...

ETZ:

I've noticed.

NR:

Have a man, let a man sing the same song slower because of overtones or whatever it is. And then I'm interest...and then have...the words...is, is..."what do these words mean?" they always say to me. So they are intimidated, and I try to be easy with them because of that. And afterwards, I say, "You sing divinely!" And then I talk to them about how I happened to write the piece and who the poet was, if I knew him, and my feelings about words and music. I don't much talk about interpretation, unless it's, I'll say, "Let the words speak for themselves. Don't interpret."

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

I don't like too much interpretation, being French. Nevertheless, when some - one Jaime Laredo or Sharon Robinson, whom I know you love, and so do I...if they'll do an extra little goose of a something. I'm always rather flattered that they've put some meaning into it, or interpretive meaning...

ETZ:

Well, I feel that, for me, you know, there's this kind of magic moment when a piece becomes a performer's piece. It's no longer mine, and I love it when they have approached it, as you say...I don't think it's so much that they know their business, and we know ours, but it's like theirs is a slightly different world...

NR It is.

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ETZ:

...dealing with the same object. And we come at it from one side of the mirror, and they're on the other, in a way.

NR:

Plus, if they put it in their repertory. Tom Stacy's played my English Horn concerto all over the place, and I'm very flattered and honored. But he recorded it, alas, not with the Philharmonic, but with the Rochester Symphony. And he denies it, but I'm sure he said...it sounds wonderful, but the orchestra is mic-ed in such a way that the nuances I've put into the orchestra are not there...

ETZ:

Mmm-hmm.

NR:

...because he is featured. He is just as happy if I don't come to the performances, 'cause it...to quote you, it's his piece now.

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

And, gosh, there are so many different ways of playing a piece, all of them right ways, according to the personality of the soloist or the conductor.

ETZ:

And it, it ripens and matures and changes over time...

NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...also.

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NR:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Ned, we're about at the end of this, and I feel like we're just getting started.

NR:

God, what time is it now?

ETZ:

It's a couple minutes after five.

NR:

After five?

ETZ:

Yeah.

NR:

God.

ETZ:

Is there anything you want to say in parting, or...

NR:

No.

ETZ:

Anything we didn't cover we should have?

NR:

No, no. I think you're terrifically good at all of this, Ellen. To allow someone like me to just blather on with his ego. I'll do it for you sometime.

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ETZ:

Okay, that's a date.

NR:

For the archives.

ETZ:

That's a date.

NR:

Yeah, okay, well, I'd love to. It's easy and the time has flown.

ETZ:

Ned, thank you very, very much.

NR:

My pleasure. Okay. Should I leave this book...donate this book to the library, or will it, will it...

Off-camera person: I think that would be great.

NR:

Who should I inscribe it to? To Carnegie Hall?

OCP: I think she knows.

NR:

'Cause there's a lot about Carnegie Hall in here.

OCP: Gino would be very happy if you did such a...

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