

Elliott Carter interviewed by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich at Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1996.

Transcript of recorded interview: Elliott Carter interviewed by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich at Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1996.

From the Library of Congress, in Washington DC

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich:

I was worried about your cold, you know.

Elliott Carter:

Well, the doctor gave me very strong antibiotic bioxcin. I took two a day and I probably have a cold but I don't know it.

ETZ:

Alright, let's see what we've got. Let's put them on the table and see what we have.

EC:

We have here a very...we'll have to go through...

ETZ:

Sure.

EC:

Can I make a recording of this on this?

Assistant: We can get you a copy of the videotape.

EC:

I mean, it's only that I always...sometimes I remember things I've never thought of before. Anyhow, that's not the point. If we could just get all of these things out.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Terrific. Very good. These are the scores?

EC:

Those are the Scriabin...

ETZ:

Terrific. And this is the...where's the Stravinsky?

EC:

This...this is that...something you might be interested in...this is what Pierre Boulez said about me.

ETZ:

I'm just going to read it right now. "The language of Elliott Carter is certainly one of the most original of this period and his development as a composer one of the most remarkable. It makes me think of the maxim: 'Follow your bent, provided it leads upward.'" I like that. "Elliott Carter's bent going continuously upward has led to an impressive height. It is true the listener may find this work somewhat difficult to approach. Certainly this music does not yield its message without some effort on the listener's part. But it then does not allow itself to be forgotten. In it all aspects of musical creativity are submitted to a radical reconsideration, to intense and profound scrutiny. Some of the aspects reinvented in it are rhythmic procedures, harmonic concepts, and formal plans. The work of Carter is one of the most deeply rethought that there is, but it has an extremely varied expressiveness. The chamber music is especially valuable, abundant, and diverse. It is rich in discoveries and musical information. In renewed contact with it one is continually enriched. Pierre Boulez, 1988." That's very nice.

ED: I don't know, I brought all kinds of crazy things. I don't know if you want that, it's like a doctor's office.

ETZ:

Oh, very good. Sure. This is from the American Academy in Rome, with which you had a very long-term association.

EC:

Oh yeah, many years.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Elliott, you brought that Stravinsky score, didn't you?

EC:

Yeah, it's somewhere right there.

ETZ:

I don't see it.

EC:

There it is.

ETZ:

Oh, here we go.

EC:

This is...

ETZ:

Did you bring the thing with the Siemens prize and, um...

EC:

Yeah, there's that big brown...I hope so.

ETZ:

This feels like a plaque.

EC:

I thought I brought the Von Siemens prize. I must have. There it is there.

ETZ:

No, that's that, uh, Specula.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Well, I certainly...

EC:

Well, here, here's a whole bunch more, Ellen...there it is.

ETZ:

Oh good.

EC:

I brought a pile of records because with...with my...with pict...most all records with pictures of me on it, excuse me.

ETZ:

That's your fault because you're so photogenic.

EC:

I thought it would be more interesting.

ETZ:

It is.

EC:

Well, here's the Von Siemens thing here.

ETZ:

Very good.

EC:

Yeah, that's not going to stand up there.

ETZ:

I think it will if I don't mess with it.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

But this, uh, you know, I can read the first sentence of that, but you may never want to think of it again.

ETZ:

“The simple label for Elliott Carter is ‘the great living composer.’” That’s Andrew Porter in 1993. Well, that’s, uh...

EC:

You know, that’s doubtful in my opinion.

ETZ:

That’s nice to hear.

EC:

I don’t think he knows as many composers as I do. Well anyhow, are you taking pictures of all of this? Good God. But, here’s the South Bank show...with all my stuff. Do you want to see that? I mean, I...

ETZ:

Yes. What I thought would be interesting would be for the camera to see all of this evidence of this international acclaim that your music has received...

EC:

Yeah. Well, I’m trying to see what I can...

ETZ:

...particularly in recent years. Um...I’m just going to put this under here.

EC:

Actually this doesn’t show...this doesn’t...I don’t see a sort of one page that shows what’s happening. This is the program for the South Bank show that they played.

ETZ:

This was in ‘91? Was this in relation to the Royal Philharmonic prize? Or that was later, wasn’t it?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Which prize? You mean...

ETZ:

Wasn't there a prize?

EC:

Where's my little blue book? I tried to make a list of everything. Where is it? Probably in here still.

EC:

Yeah, that's it. No, no, not that. Oh, you mean the Von Siemens prize.

ETZ:

No, here's the book, your bio-bibliography.

EC:

Yeah, that's the book. That helps, you see. Well, there's that and there's all these pages here. I like that. That's a...

ETZ:

That's a wonderful picture.

EC:

Via della Musica.

ETZ:

Via della Musica. In Bellagio.

EC:

Yeah, in Bellagio. But we have better pictures than these of all of this.

ETZ:

Yes, I think so.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

But, well, now that's a good picture, though, with the umbrella.

ETZ:

Yes. And we don't have that, you're right. Um, I think the interesting thing to me as an American about the Siemens prize is that they're considered a company.

EC:

I think I'm the only one that's ever received it.

ETZ:

And it's been Messiaen and Boulez and Ligeti and Stockhausen and...

EC:

That's right.

ETZ:

And Berio...

EC:

And then a lot of...a lot of conductors and other people.

ETZ:

Von Karajan...

EC:

Von Karajan.

ETZ:

Gidon Kremer.

EC:

Well...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

It's a very distinguished group of people and...

EC:

Well, who knows, how can you tell what's going to happen. And here's a program for the Viennese...this is a festival in Vienna, but, again, it's very, uh, it's also page-by-page, it doesn't...you can't even...there's not one big thing...

ETZ:

And what year is this from, Elliott, this is...

EC:

God knows. I hope they wrote it down. 1990, twelfth of November, started. Gunther conducted my Pentode and Double Concerto that day. And then they had a...they did a concert with my Etudes and Fantasy, Woodwind Quintet, the Three Occasions, and Violin Concerto, all sorts of things.

ETZ:

I've just found...

EC:

Eh...Elliott Carter spricht mit Christian Schedelmeier. Ich weiss nicht...
Anyhow...that...and then Claudio Abbado conducted my A Mirror on which to Dwell.

ETZ:

Here's a picture of you in full regalia receiving an honorary doctorate from, uh, from Cambridge.

EC:

From Cambridge...England, yeah. Yeah, there's another picture quite funny, with me and that's Naipaul. I was with...we both...and we walked down the street and Naipaul said, "I bet they don't know what we're doing, why we're walking down this street, what it all means." But they had, you know, this was crazy—it was all in Latin.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

How was your high school Latin?

EC:

And then he got into Greek in the middle of it. I thought...I can't even...I don't understand either one of them. See, here's something for PAVLVM MELLON.

ETZ:

I need a little...

EC:

The program, fortunately, translates it for those of us that... See, Helmut Schmidt got it at the same time as I did. Paul Mellon. I haven't looked at this... I suppose I... Yeah, see, there's the Greek for me. Quoting Plato, "Beware of a musical innovator, he's dangerous." That's what Plato says.

ETZ:

I'm glad they gave you a pony there. It's funny how often Plato was right. Um, is there anything else that you want us to sort of photograph here?

EC:

Well, there's a thing...there's that.

ETZ:

Oh, that's nice.

EC:

I have...it's not very well printed, is it? But I have a record of it with that on it, Charles Rosen's record of mine. It has the same photograph, with a little more shoulder on that side.

ETZ:

That's an interesting picture. Uh, here's some...

EC:

What's that?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

This is...

EC:

Oh yeah, that's from the Von Siemens. And it's just a little thing and it shows me in Von Siemens's room with Phoenix Meyer, the librarian. I don't know if you're interested. But all my...I've found that I signed it all, all my...I have to send everything I do from now on to them. I mean, I don't own anything, the minute I write a thing on paper it doesn't belong to me anymore.

ETZ:

Do you mean the Siemens Foundation?

EC:

What?

ETZ:

Or to Sacher?

EC:

Sacher Foundation.

ETZ:

To Sacher, yes.

EC:

So people are always asking, "Will you send a little piece..."

ETZ:

Yeah, this was the Sacher Foundation thing we were just looking at.

EC:

They're always asking, "Will you send a little piece of, you know, just a scribble on paper," but I don't even own it. I just make a mark and that belongs to them.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

My goodness. Here's the translation of, um, David Schiff's book into Italian. And I was at the Academy in Rome when this was...do you remember the big press conference when the book arrived with...

EC:

Oh yeah, well...

ETZ:

...a wonderful cover and not yet print inside.

EC:

Oh! Oh yeah, Rafaelli Pozzi. We had a terrible time having it translated. We went to the American embassy and found a woman named Francesca Wagner who didn't know musical terms. So when she came to translating it, every one of them was different than you expected.

ETZ:

Yes.

EC:

And...and then Raphaeli was an old friend of mine who was a musician fixed it up and then she sued him for changing its text. And it went on like that...but, finally, it didn't come to anything.

ETZ:

Oh my. But it's now published in Italian, which is great.

EC:

Oh yeah, it's published.

ETZ:

Well, we'll talk more about your...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

And it's updated, actually, from the book, the...whatever that book is, the old David Schiff. It covers things that the other David Schiff didn't. And it has a very amusing, uh, introduction, which I may have in English. I don't know if I brought it. That...well, amusing, I don't know if it's amusing. It's about how I was a child when I visited Rome for the first time with my mother and I tell a little funny story.

ETZ:

Hm. You've had a really wonderful association with both Rome and Paris, I gather, over the years.

EC:

Paris and London.

ETZ:

And London, yes, of course.

EC:

Oh, all the time in London, I mean...

ETZ:

That hardly seems like a...

EC:

That was the South Bank show, but I had...I performed...I had a festival in Dartington Hall...uh, and, well, was it a...and then I've had performances everywhere. Charles Rosen played my piano concerto in Manchester in March. It goes on all the time, they play...the BBC has played every work of mine that I've written quite a number of times. And, uh, I don't know, it's...they gave...I...I've...while I was looking for some tape to put on this recorder, I found that I had five ninety-minute tapes of a...of a show that the BBC had run on my music with commentary by different people. Well, you know, I lose them, I forget them, but I didn't...I was surprised. But see this is also a memory of Rome, when I wrote that piece about Orpheus and Euridice. And this is...this is...this is Orpheus and it's a mosaic in the Sant'Anselmo, which is on the...on the...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Oh yes.

EC:

And you're not allowed to have a picture of it, and I found one, because...the priests...the monks don't allow people to come into the refectory where it is. And I found one in Germany, in...a...German library, and I put it on, because I think it's quite amusing.

ETZ:

Yes it is. Um, do we... Here's another book.

EC:

Yes, well, that's in Tur...that's a festival that they did in Turino of my music. That was a whole week of festival. And that's a...this...that book is uh...is uh...from the festival in Barcelona. And that's...that book is a festival in Geneva. And Dennis Russell Davies conducted quite a lot of my music in Geneva and was...is...there's an extraordinary hall called Victoria Hall, looks just like Queen Victoria's. There's all sorts of crazy things all over the place. And it turns out they also may have recorded all...most of Debussy's works in this hall. Anyhow, and then there was also the festival in...oh, that's in...that's a French magazine that has a dossier about me, a whole section on me. And then...then I have the...I don't have the thing I'd like to have had and that is the festival in Avignon, which was extraordinary. That they, the...the people in Avignon, the French radio, basically, invited Charles Rosen to give classes on my...on my piano pieces and had pianists come. And then they had a man, Sylvio Gualda, that taught people how to play my timpani pieces, and Robert Aiken taught how to play my pieces that had flute in them. And...and it went on for three or four weeks. I was supposed to lecture. I got tired of it after a while. And I had a funny experience, that the...there were quite...about five or six Americans that came over for this and the rest was French and I started speaking in French and the Americans complained, when I talked in English the French complained, so...

ETZ:

Le plus ça change. This is...I don't think we can...I don't know if you can get this, but...

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

That was given to me by a man that is...that's turned out to be a great friend. He's the head of...what is it called...KölnMusik. He's...he's...Xaver Ohnesorg, which is a nice name for anybody, but, in any case, the...he runs the music, all the music in Cologne, and then Cologne commissioned a piece of mine and also then they had the big performance of my Partita, which they put on...on a...on a...on...a television show. And he gave an extraordinary...it was last winter, the winter before this...he gave an extraordinary lecture about my music. I didn't know that he liked it so well. [Laughing].

ETZ:

Well...

EC:

Are we going to sit down and talk?

ETZ:

Why don't we sit down over here and...

EC:

I'm not...I guess I'll forget my machine.

ETZ:

We'll give you a tape, Elliott.

EC:

Well now, I'll put it on, I might as well...oh, I'm going to do it again. I disconnected you again. OK, let's go.

ETZ:

Two strikes, that's it. Would you like some Pellegrino?

EC:

Sure, sure. Let me say, about Carnegie Hall, I see this picture here, that, I'm not actually sure exactly when this was, but it was certainly in the thirties when I first came to New York, I...I had...I studied piano with somebody that had a studio...I don't know just where, but somewhere there, I mean, I must have been...it think it might've been in the tower, I don't know... a man...who was a...had been a student of Nadia Boulanger and who was

Library of Congress (Music Division)

quite a good composer, who is almost unknown now, is Israel Citkowitz. Have you ever heard of him? He wrote...he wrote quite beautiful settings of James Joyce's poems and he was...he married the daughter of the man who owned Carnegie Hall, whose name was Simon, I think, and...they gave him a free studio here, so I studied with him. So that I had...I've had quite a lot of connection with...and then we also had a friend...Helen, my wife, had a friend who had a studio in Carnegie Hall, Nancy Galanchar, who was a sculptress, or painter, I think.

ETZ:

Well, for our video record, um, I'm Ellen Taaffe Zwillich. Today is November the 14th, 1996. And this is a part of our Carnegie Hall video archive. Um, I have the privilege of holding the first Carnegie Hall composer's chair and I'm here today with my mentor and friend and colleague, Elliott Carter, the, um, great American composer. And, um, Elliott, I have some more just sort of recent pictures that illustrate your, you know, your status in our world. Um, here's a nice picture of you, um, at the time of your seventieth birthday celebration. This is, um in another...outside of another concert hall across town, but we're all friends in the music world. And here's, uh, former Mayor Edward Koch.

EC:

Yeah, that was the Handel Medallion.

ETZ:

The Handel Medallion.

EC:

Whatever it might mean.

ETZ:

Well, it's a...it certainly is a nice idea, anyway.

EC:

I like Handel.

ETZ:

Oh, I love Handel.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

I love the operas of Handel, especially.

ETZ:

What it has to do with the city of New York is an interesting question.

EC:

Yes.

ETZ:

And here is, moving ahead a little bit from this, this was 1978.

EC:

Is it, I don't remember?

ETZ:

Yes, 1978, it was the time of your seventieth birthday. Here's a picture of, um, Elliott with former President Ronald Reagan and that's the presidential medal...

EC:

It's called the Medal of Arts, or Art, or something like that, and I got something that was so heavy I could hardly carry it, I don't know what I did with it, and then I also got a button, which I lost.

ETZ:

Well... This is 1985...

EC:

I tried to get another button, and when I...by that time it was another president and they said, "We don't have buttons from Mr. Reagan's time."

ETZ:

Oh, how quickly they forget, right? Here's a picture of you with, and you'll tell us who this is, this is, uh, in 1990.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh yeah, it's the Commandeur dans l'ordre des Artes et des Lettres from Paris, from the French government, who's up...down on Fifth Avenue in that French cultural building.

ETZ:

Now that medal looks small enough that you probably wouldn't have lost it.

EC:

Oh, we put it in the safe deposit box and forgot it. Oh, that's wonderful, I've just had a telephone call from those people. Boulez conducted two pieces of mine the day before yesterday there at that hotel. This is the Hotel Römerbad in Badenweiler in Germany. The man who runs the hotel, who's...I don't know where he is...but he had them all make sweatshirts for my eightieth birthday.

ETZ:

Well, this is 1988 and these...these are musicians, right?

EC:

Well, he's the head of the hotel, but he has many, many concerts. They're mostly all old ones, but in November, when the season is a little slack, they have some...he has a modern music season, which is happening right now, with Boulez and the ensemble there. And, as I said, they played two pieces of mine. Somebody called me up and told me that, the day before yesterday. In fact, today the Arditti Quartet is playing my Fifth Quartet in Berlin, I noticed.

ETZ:

And here's...

EC:

Now that's a magazine that's published by IRCAM.

ETZ:

IRCAM, which is in...Paris, of course, and here's an older picture of you with Pierre Boulez, and that's in his study at the Philharmonic...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh, yeah. That's when he was on the...at the Philharmonic, yeah.

ETZ:

...before he moved to IRCAM. This would have been maybe '75, or something...'79.

EC:

That must have been just about the time he stopped.

ETZ:

Yeah.

EC:

Well, you know...

ETZ:

And this is from '93 and the Centre Pompidou.

EC:

Yes. The...do you...I don't know whether this is the time to talk about Boulez, but I can...I must say that Boulez did something extraordinary of mine at the Philharmonic, you know, he took my Concerto for Orchestra and played it at a whole evening concert and we analyzed it and talked about it and...and played examples and quoted the poetry that was connected with it. It was a whole evening of...of...just devoted to that one piece. It's not the sort of thing...he didn't do it for anybody else except for Varèse and that was something apparently that the people at the Philharmonic didn't approve of too much, but they got quite a good audience for it.

ETZ:

Yes, and, um, he has been...I think one of the unique things about your career is the...um, length that people are willing to go to support your music.

EC:

Yeah.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

For instance, a person of the stature of Boulez has, um, done so much to bring your work to the public.

EC:

Yeah, it takes, a lot of those pieces all take a great deal of rehearsal and a great deal of effort and...it's not such an easy job to give a festival with all...with any number of pieces because it's a terrible lot of rehearsing involved. But they do it.

ETZ:

Sure. Here's...a little closer to home, here's a 1993 Musical America, which...

EC:

Well, yes, they have that thing that I just...you just read.

ETZ:

Yes, where Andrew Porter called you "the greatest living composer."

EC:

I don't know, he quoted...it's in quotes, so I think we don't believe it.

ETZ:

[Laughing]. Well, as they say, it's better than a slap in the face. No, it's...you know, I think probably the thing that I feel strongest about it isn't so much that, I mean, it's wonderful to have received all these honors and the accolades, but the...the wonderful thing is this interaction with the...with the public and the performers, where, in an age where many people are retired, I think you sort of blossomed and are continuing to sort of pour out an incredible amount of music.

EC:

Well, I just finished my Clarinet Concerto now. Well, I don't know...I don't know what I'd do if I didn't do it. I have to keep going because it's...that's what I like to do. I enjoy doing it.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

It's interesting that the, uh, the two very different models of composers, the ones that sort of emerge full-blown in their teens and, um, sometimes never change and then those that, I think of Haydn or Verdi, um, composers that sort of blossom on and on.

EC:

Well, Verdi, eh...well, he was younger than I am, he certainly was extraordinary. He wrote two extraordinary operas at the end of his life which were very much better, well, they are, in many ways, much better than the others, they're certainly much more intricate and more sensitive than the older ones. But Falstaff is a real problem to perform well, I mean...it's so complicated and so many little things happen, that it takes...it must take a lot of rehearsal in order to get it well. I haven't seen a recent performance, but the last one I saw was in Rome and it was disappointing, the women's chorus is always kind of fuzzy.

ETZ:

Yeah. I think they're doing a new production at the Met this year. But that is, I mean, it is extraordinary to have Otello and Falstaff...

EC:

Oh, yeah, Otello is wonderful through the whole thing.

ETZ:

This later flowering of music and, um, it's very inspiring for, you know, a younger composer to see this.

ETZ:

Here, this is something from the gold medal in, um...

EC:

I just got it this summer, the...the medal from the Royal Philharmonic Society.

ETZ:

Oh, and that's Michael Tippett presenting it to you.

EC:

Yeah, Michael Tippett gave it to me. And, uh, it turns...you know, the Royal Philharmonic Society commissioned the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, so they're still working.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Oh my goodness. And here's a picture of you with Ollie Knussen, who, I think, probably conducted RPO. And, uh, moving ever closer to home, here's this, um...oh yes, we do have those posters.

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Robert, when you get a minute, why don't you just bring them out and put them over here somewhere so we can...

EC:

Where are they? Yeah, they're in that big cardboard thing.

ETZ:

Here's a...a smaller version of the poster.

EC:

Well, that's what...you organized that and I appreciate it.

ETZ:

Well, Carnegie...

EC:

We have to put it...the big poster...big poster because it has "Sold Out" on it.

ETZ:

Yes, that's always a very nice thing to see.

EC:

Talking about "Sold Out," you know that years ago Stravinsky, I think it was Lukas Foss, decided to do The Story of the Soldier with Aaron Copland the narrator, myself as the...as

Library of Congress (Music Division)

the soldier, and John Cage as the devil. And John Cage kept referring to the thing as “The Story of the Sold Out.” And it was sold out.

ETZ:

That was rather devilish I think. [break in tape]

EC:

Well, I'll say, if you want me to...is this a part of what I should say?

ETZ:

You can say anything you like.

EC:

Well, Aaron Copland and I met three or four times to speak our parts in The Story of the Soldier and John Cage was somewhere, we couldn't find out where he was, and he finally came to the last of our minor rehearsals and he said, “Oh, you do it so beautifully I don't know what I'm going to do.” And so then we got onto the stage at Fisher Hall, what then was Philharmonic Hall, and he sort of mumbled he had never heard this music of The Story of the Soldier of Stravinsky before...

ETZ:

Really?

EC:

...and he said he thought it was pretty good, he told me. And then when he started to talk he the devil and he yelled and, you know, we didn't expect that and we couldn't tell because we were sitting there with microphones in front of him and we didn't know it was like that. Helen said that he just was yelling like anything and the whole audience went, you know, applauded and we sort of slunk off. [Laughing]. Aaron and I were intimidated by all of this. And so then, after the concert, after it was over, we went backstage with Stravinsky and Stravinsky, I said “Mr. Stravinsky, would you like to meet John Cage?” And he said “yes” and then he said to John Cage, “You know, you're the only sensible composer—you don't write notes.” [Laughing].

ETZ:

I'd like to sort of race back to the very beginning now.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh god, go ahead.

ETZ:

Elliott Carter was born December 11th, 1908, and born in New York.

EC:

I was born on 95th Street, on the south side of 95th Street, between Riverside Drive and West End Avenue. I don't remember the number of the apartment house. It's still there.

ETZ:

Gee, I used to live a block away from there. I didn't, uh, know that.

EC:

And then we...do you want me to go on with this?

ETZ:

Yes, sure.

EC:

And then we moved to Amsterdam Avenue and 97th Street on the northwest corner, which is still there. I think John Jan Opalach lives in that building now. We were on the fourth floor. And I remember that rather well. I was about three or four years old. I remember having chicken pox and thinking chickens were pecking me. And then...then we moved to...to Flatbush. And...that was about six or seven, I was going to kindergarten. But at that point, from that time on... there's a picture of me in Flatbush in front of...it was a house with a porch, which you can see in the background, and...that...since my father was an importer of lace and very concerned with importing, he started to have me talk French and I had a charming French governess, Mademoiselle Lonbouler, and...she persisted in my life for a great many years. We...later, after we started and I learned everything about subjunctives and God knows what, but, in any case, I could...at that time I got...could speak French better than English. Then we moved to 420 Riverside Drive, which is 114th Street. And we lived at that apartment house, first on the ground floor and then the eleventh floor, during a good part of the First World War, in which we...it was enchanting to me to see all the war...the British war ships on the Hudson River at that time. You know, I

Library of Congress (Music Division)

didn't see...think about the war, I was too childish to understand that. And then after that, I...I went...became, uh...lived in a dormitory in the Horace Mann School up in Riverdale, and then I went to Harvard. But that's...my family, meanwhile, moved to various other places in the city.

ETZ:

You mentioned that you were too young to have a real appreciation of the First World War.

EC:

Well, you know, it was just exciting to see a lot of war ships.

ETZ:

Yeah, sure, and probably identifying them and whatnot.

EC:

Yeah, sure, and Riverside Drive was quite interesting because, at that time, the railroad ran right along the edge of the river so that all...all us boys would run down and hail the freight cars as they went by. And also, if you remember, 116th Street has that long descent from Broadway down to Riverside Drive. I sleigh-rided down that and broke my nose on the fountain down at the bottom. I remember that... And also, you know that my governess, who followed me around a good deal, and did even fairly late, I don't remember when it stopped, but, this perhaps I shouldn't say, you know, she kept...in French if you say chut, it means that you...should... my...my colleagues all kept saying, "why does she say shit all the time?" [Laughing].

ETZ:

Um, you've mentioned to me before that your father had taken you later, you know, when you were a young man, to visit some of the battlefields of World War I and wanting to...

EC:

Oh, yes. As far as I can tell, that must have been about 1923 that my father...we made what used to be called a grand tour. And my father took me to see the...A) my father was a...was...had had polio and was rather lame and had nothing to...was not in...fighting in the war, but he did go to Europe four times a year even during the war. We all sat there trembling thinking the boat that he was on would be torpedoed. In any case, he continued

Library of Congress (Music Division)

his business affairs even in very difficult times. In fact, he made over a hundred trips to Europe in the course of his life. And at the age of thirteen he was sent by his father, who started the lace business, to do the kinds of...to go and talk to people about making lace in various parts of Europe—in Switzerland, in France, in Italy, in Belgium. And so father spoke all those languages and...he could speak German. But our tour involved a whole going to the battlefields. I remember the cathedral at Reims was all completely wrecked, it was later remodeled...re-fixed by the Rockefeller Foundation. And...we...I remember also that we went...we took...went to Basel with...

ETZ:

Perhaps...

EC:

I'll shorten this...I think so. Now I want to say one thing.

ETZ:

The important point is that this is in the decade just immediately following the war.

EC:

Let me say one thing, though. During this time, when we went to Germany, uh...after the war, it was really a terrible thing for me as a...very young American boy, and that was...because I remember buying binoculars for my scoutmaster at the time when there were a million marks to a dollar...every day there would be more marks and finally we reached more than a million to a dollar and everybody was completely wiped out, I mean, there were people who had investments and money in the bank. It became...it was a disastrous and terrible time and I remember we stayed in Hotel Adlon in Berlin and the waiter stole the food off the table as soon as...if we didn't eat it quickly. And I, you know, it was very hard, an unexpected and terrifying experience as a child. Anyhow, I don't know where we're at now.

ETZ:

Well, I'm...I just...I have a feeling, in the psyche of a composer, there's something that must really stick with you with having seen this at an early age, and it's not like, you know, going to a well manicured lawn that has a plaque saying "a battlefield," but to actually see the results of war and to feel the social...just what you said, for instance.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh, it was terrible and... Let me say one more thing, and that is that then, later, when I went to Harvard, I was very anxious to learn German. It's a...language that I never really conquered, but in any case, I used to go to Munich in the...this was, I should say, around '27, '28...I went to Harvard in '26. I used to spend the summers in Munich, partly to see the operas, to see the Wagner operas and the Mozart operas, but also to speak German. And I made a number of German friends that I remember so distinctly saying to them, "All of us, we all agree we would never fight in war again," and we felt...they all felt very strongly about it. Times have changed a lot.

ETZ:

Yeah. Um, you mention Horace Mann. When you were there, this was high school, what was the point where you became, um, kind of a protégé of Ives?

EC:

Well, I...yes, well, I had a music teacher at Horace Mann, he gave a music appreciation course, who was very interested in contemporary music of that time. And it was...and...at Horace Mann, we had a number of rather interesting colleagues and one of them was Eugene O'Neill's son. So I...at that time, all of the plays of Eugene O'Neill that were played down in the village and the Providence town playhouse. And then I also...I had this music teacher that took us to meet Charles Ives and there was...this was partly during the time of prohibition and we used to go over to a little speakeasy down on Christopher Street where Varèse was, and I met both of them in those early years when I was a high school student. And I got to know Ives quite well, so that when I...when Henry Cowell started his New Music edition, which Ives helped to finance, Ives sent me all...all of the scores that they printed, including his own, so that remained...that was an important thing. I wrote...started writing some silly little pieces and Ives thought they had some quality and he not only wrote a recommendation for me to go into Harvard, but also he encouraged me to be a composer. But I...actually, I think the decision to become a composer came when I heard *The Rite of Spring* live. That was the thing that made...made the biggest impression on me out of anything that I had ever heard. I'd never...and I didn't like old music at that time, and so...

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Elliott, we have a little, not exactly a surprise for you, but, um, this is the program that you were talking about. This is in 1928, the Philadelphia Orchestra. Stokowski was the conductor, but Monteux was the guest conductor for this performance and they did Beethoven, Coriolanus, Schumann Fourth Symphony, and Stravinsky The Rite of Spring.

EC:

And boy, wasn't the audience mad.

ETZ:

Really, I was going to ask you.

EC:

Half of them got up and walked out. Oh, it was a scandal. My father went with me to that and, as I remember, he said to me, "Only a madman would write anything like that."

ETZ:

Really?

EC:

I think that interested me more than anything.

ETZ:

Well, I was going to say that maybe that had...in itself. Um, you know, it's funny, when we think about the history of Carnegie Hall. Carnegie Hall was quite young at this time.

EC:

Of course, I didn't know that at the time. I went to many, many concerts, mostly sitting up in the top gallery where I found the acoustics very good.

ETZ:

Oh, yes, still wonderful up there. Did Ives take you to...bring you to concerts here?

EC:

Well, Ives was...I don't know whether you have the programs and I'd be very interested to know, but Ives was a subscriber to the Boston Symphony on a...I think it was a Friday or Saturday afternoon series of concerts. And occasionally people would...since he had a

Library of Congress (Music Division)

box, there was sometimes that there was nobody, you know, there was room in the box and he sometimes invited me to go. Now, there has been in my mind an uncertainty about what he heard, because I claimed, and I remember very distinctly, it seemed to me, talking about...about Stravinsky to Ives when he lived down near Gramercy Park and his getting down to the piano and saying, "I can't stand this sort of thing," and he banged the thing that sounded just like those chords in The Rite of Spring.

ETZ:

In the "Dance of the Adolescents?"

EC:

And...and people now say that he'd never heard The Rite of Spring and I don't know that that...maybe it's from chance or maybe my memory isn't clear, but they claim that he did know the Firebird and he didn't like it because it was too repetitious.

ETZ:

Hm. Well, it's nice to, I'm getting pleasure of putting my hands on the program that...

EC:

That's exciting.

ETZ:

...turned you into a composer, or caused you to feel strongly about it.

EC:

Yeah. And then at that time they were also...we had...there was a big thing in Wanamaker's, the store of Wanamaker's had a...had a big atrium...in the old store and they used to, Stokowsky used to occasionally give...give concerts there and I heard a lot of Varèse at that time.

ETZ:

I wish we had a picture of you with both Ives and Varèse.

EC:

Well, I don't have one, I just simply don't have one.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

It's a shame. But this is a picture of you at eighteen, so that's probably not too far away from the time that, um, you heard this. This was '28. Um, this was a couple of years later.

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Um, it's interesting how your life has been intertwined with Stravinsky over the years.

EC:

Oh yes, well, it became...of course at that time I didn't know Stravinsky...in fact, he wasn't here at that time.

ETZ:

When did you meet him? I don't recall ever hearing or reading that.

EC:

I...well, I met him first, but not in a social...we...when Stravinsky wrote Persephone, it was when I was studying with Nadia Boulanger, it was right there in that picture, and, uh...she had Stravinsky come to her house where we studied in her living room and play over Persephone with the tenor from the Paris Opera, and Stravinsky played the piano. And we, the...the students of Nadia, we all sang the chorus, we sang the choruses in Persephone. And so I talked to Stravinsky a little bit at that time. But then later...

ETZ:

So, this would have been in the thirties?

EC:

Yes, this was in the thirties. And then later, we...we, uh...Robert Craft did my double concerto in Los Angeles and Stravinsky, Mr. and Mrs. Stravinsky, gave a party for that concert and invited me, and I came, and it was a funny kind of party because there was Aldous Huxley and...I don't know, Christopher Isherwood and a whole bunch of people whom I recognized only from having seen photographs. But I...Stravinsky didn't talk to anybody, he and I sat off in the corner. And finally I said to him, "You know, there's one

Library of Congress (Music Division)

thing I'd like to know and that is when you compose, what do you do first?" And he took me into his studio and at that time he was writing that, uh...what is it called, the thing...the biblical thing about Noah's ark...what is it?

ETZ:

Uh, The Flood.

EC:

Yeah, he was writing The Flood and he showed me a scrapbook with little tiny pieces of paper with notes...a few notes here, a few notes there, and all different colored papers, and he said... I said, "Well how do you know when you write that that you're going to have that over here and how they connect together." "Oh," he said, "I shuffle them around and sometimes a do it...rewrite them." And...people say that I'm telling a lie, that I'm not telling the truth, but that's what I saw. But he had lots of little...he had written...what he had was some sort of a serial...a twelve-tone arrangement and then he...and then he...he wrote lots of little ideas about them and then gradually assembled them. Of course, The Flood itself is very scrappy, only little shreds of things here and there, so it's not that unusual. But the evidence is that Stravinsky did cut things like that.

ETZ:

Like a sort of cinematic way, yeah.

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Um, the Double Concerto is a piece about which Stravinsky wrote, "a masterpiece by an American composer," there...so there. Um, so that seems to be the point where he really...

EC:

Yeah, well, after that I kind of felt I really owed something to him. But...actually, the Double Concerto had a...had quite a life. It was commissioned by another person who was very important in my life, Paul Fromm, and he always said that this was his Firebird because it got played a great deal at the time for...for, uh, because Paul Jacobs, who played the harpsichord in it, was very determined to get performances and there were many of them, all over the place. It...but it stopped being played in the United States. It

Library of Congress (Music Division)

still gets played...it's been played last year in Paris, and it was played in Turin and other places, but it...it's a very difficult piece to...

ETZ:

It's a very hard piece to put together.

EC:

It's a very hard piece to put together, especially if you don't have the right harpsichord.

ETZ:

Um, let's...there's just so much to do here, let me back up a little bit. When you were at Harvard you were again following the family dictates that they really didn't want you to go into music.

EC:

Oh, no, my family certainly felt that they didn't want me to go into music at all. And it wasn't only that I was following their dictates. I would have gone into music and studied if the Harvard music department had been interesting, but it was, you know...they...I really went to Harvard because the Boston Symphony was playing so much contemporary music under Koussevitzky and...I'd heard them play here in Carnegie Hall many...many new pieces. Koussevitzky conducted every new piece of Stravinsky practically the year that it was written, so that there was a great deal of...of interesting concerts. He played all kinds of other composers. But many, many contemporary composers, not any...not any Viennese, let us say, but lots of Germans, Russians, and English, and Italian ones. And then even the Boston Pops for a while had Alfredo Casella, the Italian composer, as a...as a director and he played a lot of Debussy, too.

ETZ:

I didn't know that.

EC:

I...I knew Casella somewhat. But then...and...but then the Harvard music department looked on this as a disaster, and they hated it all, every...every one of the teachers except Edward Burlingame Hill were very much against it until...Walter Piston came, who had been a student of Nadia Boulanger. He came while I was just at the end of my...my

Library of Congress (Music Division)

undergraduate years and I decided then to go into music and take graduate courses in music, and so I did. And that was from '30 to '32.

ETZ:

How about Holst?

EC:

And during the time of...during the time that I was...I took graduate courses Gustav Holst was a visiting professor. And he came, he was a very...Paul Holst was a very odd man, I think he had a great...had trouble with his eyes and he couldn't play the piano, but he insisted on our playing the piano, playing our pieces over on the piano. I've always...I've never been a good pianist and I have a disease called Dupuytren's contracture, which makes my fingers crooked. And it was rather odd for me to play, and he used to tell me, he said to me, "You know, Mr. Carter, I think you write wrong notes even though you don't play them right," I mean, he was very...quite cross about the way...what happened and I think he was right because it was probably awful what I did. In any case, he was a very nice man in a way, except that he really didn't...didn't quite catch the spirit of the contemporary music that I liked at that time.

ETZ:

So, then you left Harvard in 1932 and went to study...

EC:

Went to Nadia...I went to...

ETZ:

Here's Nadia Boulanger.

EC:

And I had a...practically the week...I would have studied probably with Schoenberg if I had waited another year. That was the same time that he came...he came to New York. But I didn't know that and...the problem was at that time that Nadia Boulanger and Schoenberg were really the only people that would...took contemporary music seriously and could talk about it and criticize composers for what they wrote, so that, uh....and then I always spoke French, of course, and was familiar with Paris very well, for instance, I had been there many times with my father, so that that seemed like a reasonable thing. When

Library of Congress (Music Division)

I got there the...things got very dark, the life...life in Paris. There was the Reichstag Fire, which I think was within a week after I arrived. There was the terrible rise of Hitler that was very frightening. And...and from that time on, Paris was overwhelmed with refugees from Germany. It was a very sad time. I must say that when I left Paris in 1935, I thought I never would go back because it was such a sad and disagreeable, unhappy time. I had, actually, some German friends during that time, some musicians. Some of them managed to live through the occupation and then turned up again after it. But...but it was...Nadia was very ambivalent about all of this. She didn't want to talk about it and discuss it. She was there for music and music must go on no matter what happened. That was her attitude.

ETZ:

That's not my department, sort of. I'm a musician, I'm not a politician.

EC:

Well, I think that's probably right, except it isn't right exactly. It's disturbing, I think, it's a disturbing point of view.

ETZ:

I think so, too.

EC:

We had this awful thing when I was there. There was the Stavisky Affair, in which many people were killed on the Place de la Concorde. There were buses burned and there were lots of young people that went around smashing windows and breaking everything. The next day after that, the subway had stopped, so I had to walk from my hotel, which was in the Left Bank in Rue Monsieur le Prince to the Ecole Normale, which is way over on the other side of the river near Boulevard Maiesherbes. And I was the only student that appeared and there was Nadia and she just said to me, "You know, music has got to go on no matter what happens," and I was rather shocked, and yet she was right, from one's own personal point of view, but it's hard to live through that.

ETZ:

Um, actually, I noticed, in looking through some materials in preparation for this, something that I...had escaped my attention before, but that in '43 you were a music consultant to the Office of War Information.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh yeah, during the war I...I have a number of allergies...

ETZ:

This was back in the States.

EC:

Yes, oh wait, well of course, I came back in '35.

ETZ:

'35, yeah.

EC:

I had lived for a short time in Cambridge and I wrote...and now this is it and it may be part of your story...I wrote incidental music for a performance of classical...a Latin play by...well, it's called Mostellaria, and at the end of it I decided to have a dance and I wrote a choral tarantella, which was taken up by the Harvard Glee Club and everybody liked it so much they finally...that finally Lincoln Kirstein, who is one of my colleagues at Harvard, decided to commission me for a ballet and got me into the ballet caravan and all sorts of things. But it was mainly because of that little tarantella which was played, and still gets played occasionally by the Harvard Glee Club, and...but it was that that got me started on my...field of composition. And it's pretty good, too. It's not a bad piece. It's a little bit derivative, but it's a good piece.

ETZ:

Well, that's high praise coming from yourself because I know you've discarded an awful lot of music that...

EC:

Well, before that I wrote a lot of trash, I thought.

ETZ:

[Laughing]. I know the feeling. Um, I wanted to ask you about the Second World War, the Holiday Overture, which is the first piece we have here at Carnegie in our archive.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Well, OK, you're skipping that, but...in between, around 1939, I wrote the ballet for...the first...for what was called Ballet Caravan, a ballet called Pocahontas, and it was given...well, it was given at Martin Beck Theater with Aaron Copland's Billy the Kid and I've forgotten what the other ballet was, by Lincoln Kirstein and the predecessor of the present New York City Ballet. And...it wasn't...somebody...Pittman told me he liked the score and was going to do it in London...but it hasn't been played much since that time. And, uh, that...after that I began to write all kinds of things. The ballet was not very successful and Aaron said you have to be around quite a long time to get any kind of praise. That impressed me, too. But, in any case, that...I can't remember now...well, I wrote little pieces, I wrote a piece, I think, that...you were asking about '43...what was '43?

ETZ:

Well, I was asking about the Holiday Overture because this is the performance that Mitropoulos gave.

EC:

Well, I...I worked at the Office of War Information during the war. It was headed by Roy Harris and my colleague was Henry Cowell and we worked for, I think, two years in a building on 57th Street and Broadway. And...and, uh, what it was concerned with was sending, uh, musical things to Europe, the occupied Europe by radio, so we made programs of various sorts of things, American music and all sorts of things. Anyhow, when I resigned, I...I don't remember why I left, but I left the Office of War Information just before D-Day. We knew more or less when D-Day was going to happen. And I left, and we went, my wife and I and son, went over to...rented a house in Saltaire, Fire Island, and there I wrote my Holiday Overture during the time when the Americans were invading Europe and a holiday was thought to be the holiday that Paris would have when...when they were freed from the Germans. And...uh, that...that was...it written then and...I must say, that during the time I was writing it, Aaron Copland came and lived with us for a few...came to visit us for a couple of days and was writing Appalachian Spring on the dining room table. I remember that. We were worried about a double bass part somewhere. And then the Holiday Overture had its story, which was very unpleasant. Later, there was a prize contest given by...

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Pardon me, I just dropped 1957.

EC:

But there was...let me tell you about the Holiday Overture before you get to that. There was a prize contest for...for music by...given by a blueprinting company called Independent Music Publishers, on 42nd Street. They had as...as...as jurors Koussevitzky, Aaron, and a...Russian composer Nicolas Berezowsky. They chose my two pieces. They gave...divided the first prize between a piece by William Bergsman and myself. And...the...part of the prize consisted of the Boston Symphony would play it and Koussevitzky...I had the parts copied and they sent it to Boston and then it never got played. It went on for a year and, finally, I kept calling them up and saying, "When are you going to play it?" and they said, "Well, maybe Dr. Koussevitzky will do it next week." And I said, well...finally I said, I said, "Well, can, we better send the parts back I don't think he'll do it at all." "Oh, if you take it away he'll certainly..." So I went to Boston and had the parts Xeroxed, or whatever they did at that time...photostated, and...I found that the first performance was in Germany..it was the American troops were wandering around somewhere in Cologne or I don't know where, I've forgotten now what town it was...and...it was conducted by a man named Hans Blumer, and...so it's first performance was there...I didn't hear it for years until perhaps that performance you've got here.

ETZ:

Well, this is Mitropoulos...
[break in tape]

EC:

...you get into this thing and you're finding so many things to remember.

ETZ:

Well, I find it fascinating because, you know, its...I don't know, perhaps you have to...

EC:

But what I have to say about these pieces is...many of my pieces have had this kind of a tricky problem...and let me go on with the Holiday Overture because it's quite funny. When Mitropoulos played it here, first of all he said to me, "Mr. Carter, I want you to come up and take a bow on the stage and that means you've got to put on your evening clothes," because it was an evening concert, and I said, "Well, look, I don't have any," and he...and

Library of Congress (Music Division)

finally I persuaded him I would wear a blue suit and it would be OK and when we got out onto the stage and he said to me, pointing to the audience, "Those are our enemies." I thought that was very funny. It was very characteristic of him, he was kind of a freaky man, he played all sorts of things, the Schoenberg Five Pieces and...Alban Berg pieces and Schoenberg Variations, but later...in fact, he made a ...I had an old scratchy recording of the Variations, he gave a course on it, on his recording of it in Dartington Hall in England. Let me say that there's now...coming after the Second War...many things began to happen that were different. For one thing, we...Helen and I went to Europe...in '47 and we were given actually an odd place to stay by an American composer named Sam Barlow, who had a chateau down in the south of France and we stayed in it during the summer. But on the way we...we stayed in England and visited some friends of ours that we knew and one of them turned out to be married to William Glock, who was at that time running a little festival in a place called Bryanston. William Glock became one of the most important people in my life because he...then became the main, oh, I've forgotten what it's called, chancellor of music at the BBC and played contemporary music and played all of my music, he wrote articles about me...he wrote praise about me when I got the Von Siemens prize. He's still alive and...

ETZ:

Yes, it's his appreciation that's printed there.

EC:

And he's...really an extraordinary man. Mr. Glock...Sir William Glock, actually, changed the face of British music, he commissioned all sorts of people, Michael Tippett and...Davie...what's his name...

ETZ:

Max Davies, Maxwell Davies.

EC:

Maxwell Davies and Harry Burtwistle, all these people got generous commissions from this...from William...make British music come back as it had not been when he first started. So this was a very remarkable thing and...William was really very important. The other person that I haven't mentioned was Nicolas Nabokov. Nicolas Nabokov was a Russian composer who came to this country, I'm not quite sure when, but certainly...after the Russian Revolution, and...and, uh, had a ballet played called Union

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Pacific by...by...Massine's ballet. It showed the building of the Union Pacific and the meeting of the railroads in the middle of the United States and it had some very nice things in it. It was...and...Lincoln Kersty introduced me to him and he helped me orchestrate the...that tarantella that I was talking about and I learned more about orchestration from...him watching me...over my shoulder at that time and so even the Holiday Overture was partly...yes, Nicolas is on that picture with Virgil Thomson.

ETZ:

Here's Elliott and Nicolas Nabokov and Virgil Thomson.

EC:

But Nicolas was also a friend of Stravinsky...and...he was a very active man so that shortly after the war he started a thing called Congress for Cultural Freedom and gave...festivals, modern music and literary festivals, in all sorts of different places. So I was invited by him, for instance, to Tokyo where he gave a modern music festival, the Julliard Quartet went there and played my Quartet...my Second Quartet, but he was more...he was more helpful to me...he got me jobs when... He was a man that was always carrying on doing all kinds of things, so he never got anything quite...nothing turned out the way he expected. He had...had been hired by St. John's College to teach there in Annapolis and he couldn't fulfill it the year that they asked him so he asked me to take his place. And I stayed on for a couple of years and the same thing, he was asked to teach at the Peabody Conservatory and again couldn't go because he had something else that came up that was more important and so I took his place there and he never came back to Peabody, so I got that...he was very helpful to me in all kinds of ways, he got performances for me and then later...had my...when I was at the American Academy in Rome in '53, he had a festival in Rome, which he was the composer in residence at the Academy, and ran a festival and had my First String Quartet played there.

ETZ:

[Coughing]. Sorry.

EC:

Oh, come on...

ETZ:

Does anybody have a cough drop?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

There it is. Do you want to take that picture? That's 1957. You see, that was a long time after the...after the...

ETZ:

[Coughing]. Yes...that is.

EC:

Oh, I don't have a cough drop. Do you have one?

ETZ:

I'm looking to see if I have something.

EC:

So, what is this? Is this from my...what year is that? Seventy-fifth birthday.

ETZ:

And here's for 80. And that's Richard Henesy.

EC:

Yeah, that's Richard. He did both of them.

ETZ:

A painter that...

EC:

How are we gonna... I don't think that's gonna do so well. We have to have four, I guess. Here, I'll get another one. Oh, Ellen, I'm sorry. OK? You think you're...you think it's OK, are you alright?

ETZ:

Yeah, I'm fine, I had a...

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

OK. What a shame. OK, well, let's...

ETZ:

With the characteristic of your works in the '40s as being somewhat populist and...

EC:

Well, I don't think it was thought of as being populist, but it certainly has that aspect of it. I mean, I myself felt that...one had...that a composer had a responsibility to meet a certain audience. And, uh, I wrote music that I... I was writing rather politically during the...during the...especially during the Hitler time...and...I felt that it was part of our job to write something for...for the people, so to speak, whoever the people are, or is, excuse me. And...so...I thought that those pieces...but the Holiday Overture is the beginning of a change to another...I had written a...a First Symphony when I was...right after I left St. John's College in '41, in Santa Fe, and that was much more populace than the Holiday Overture, which is much...which already begins to have quite a lot of rather intricate things that go on in it, I mean although...it has a reference...it constantly refers to jazz. But I think...I...then I...when I...the fact that these populace pieces...so many populace pieces...I don't think it'd be quite...never had any success at all, I began to be bored with the whole idea of it. For one thing, I had always, since I was interested in...very what was called modern extreme music like Stravinsky's early works and Schoenberg...and Varèse...was always in the back of my mind...and in a sense I felt that I couldn't write that kind of music until I had tried to write other kinds of music and Nadia made it clear to me that I'd better write more or less ordinary music in order...to learn how to do it. And then at the...at the...the Holiday Overture was when? '45...by February...

ETZ:

Uh, '44, '44.

EC:

What?

ETZ:

I have '44.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

'44, yeah, '44,'45. By that time...by the time...well, you see, you have that program of '45 when it was played, wasn't it?

ETZ:

Well, no, '57.

EC:

Oh no, well then, yeah...

ETZ:

It wasn't played until '57.

EC:

But by that date, you can see that there was a great gap, it was hardly played except that once in Germany and, also, Celibidache...

ETZ:

And Koussevitzky never played it?

EC:

Celibidache told me that he played it somewhere, I don't know where now, Holland or something...but the...it was never played and it was rather discouraging and, beside that, I began to feel that maybe I would just sort of write what I really wanted to write from the very beginning as a child when I first got interested in music. And so I got a Guggenheim Fellowship and went off to...to San...to Tucson, wrote my First String Quartet.

ETZ:

This was in '51, wasn't it?

EC:

1950.

ETZ:

1950.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

'50, 1950.

ETZ:

This...I know a lot of writers have made much of, you know, going to the desert and, uh, in sort of an isolation, uh...

EC:

Well, I don't know if it was that...

ETZ:

...defining a new...

EC:

...it's hard say...that it was...that had actually...we went to a place...partly, to Tucson, because we'd never been out west and we drove there...and...I knew that...E.E. Cummings had rented a house in Tucson and we found that it was free, so we took the house...took the house, it was on the...on an estate of a woman named Mrs. D'Autremont...

ETZ:

Was he a friend of yours, E.E. Cummings?

EC:

No, I had met him, but...he was not a friend, he lived right around the corner from us, but, but, uh, Cummings...but we knew that he had lived there and...Mrs. Dotremont was very anxious...was glad to have us come to...come to her house, there were other guest houses, there was a man named Joseph Wood Krutch that lived in another house and was very helpful and very interesting to us. He...he had been, I think, a literary critic in New York on the Nation and finally got interested in nature. But...I...I can't say whether the desert made anything...had any affect...I just worked like the devil the whole time. The String Quartet was a very elaborate piece of work, I mean, it...was full of very...very unusual things and...I kept feeling I was writing something very, you know, might never be played, but it was...very...was what I wanted to do. The String Quartet, like the Holiday Overture, had it's mad...had a mad story connected with it. I submitted it to a prize contest

Library of Congress (Music Division)

in Belgium, uh, at Liege...it was a string quartet prize contest and it was the kind of contest...contest in which first they gave a prize to the people who made the violins and strings and the next year they gave it to the string quartet. The third year they gave it to a composer, and the fourth year, the...quartet that won and had played the instruments that had been chosen in the quartet.

ETZ:

How nice! I love that, that's...

EC:

That was a nice idea except that my piece was much harder than they ever expected. They...they...finally...they finally did learn it, and...but they had to have a conductor for it, which I can't understand...I don't know how they could have a conductor...anyhow, they did...and...and...it would have won the prize. However, it had been...it took most of a year to get this...get them...get the Quartet played and everything...and to decide on the prize. By that time I thought I had never got it. So, another American quartet, the Walden Quartet, learned it and played it before the prize was given and I had to refuse the prize because part of the condition was...that...that the piece should never have been played before. So...and Mrs. Koussevitzky, who'd put up the money for the prize, was furious, I mean... But I was glad to have a good performance. The Walden Quartet...went around playing it in quite a number of places, played it at Columbia University while I was teaching there for a while and played it later at the YMHA and then in St. Louis and around in different places in America.

ETZ:

Um, this was the decade also when you went to Rome, you had a Prix de Rome for the first time.

EC:

Well, yeah, let me say, the other thing about that First String Quartet is that I...that...you know, a French string quartet learned it, the Paranant Quartet, and...then I won the Rome prize in '53 and '54, and...Nicolas Nabokov arranged...had a...a big modern music festival to which Dallapiccola and Stravinsky and Boulez and all sorts of people were invited to do different things and he invited Paranant Quartet to play my First String Quartet in Rome. Now, it had never made much of an impression in New York and wherever it was played people found it very puzzling and peculiar. But in...in Italy it made a very different

Library of Congress (Music Division)

impression. Both Dallapiccola and Petrassi, the two leading composers of Italy, became fast friends...from that time on, and even Petrassi was, oddly enough, was the only person in my whole life who asked me to...if we could call each other tu, we talked in French mostly...and sometimes Italian...but no one had ever said that to me before, that we could talk in the second person singular.

ETZ:

Really? Here's a kind of a recent picture of you with Petrassi. This is...from 1982.

EC:

Yeah, well, he's still alive. He's blind, unfortunately, as you can see, as even there his eyes are funny. He was a wonde...he's a composer who's much neglected here. He was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony and...a number of other...organizations around the country. The Julliard School commissioned a piece of his, too.

ETZ:

This is a picture of you and Petrassi in a wonderful church in Italy.

EC:

Oh, yeah, that's wonderful. You see, I think this is Petrassi's eightieth birthday and I wrote a piece for that...

ETZ:

1983.

EC:

...for a festival south of Rome called Pontino Festival, which...and that's in the church of Fossanova. It's beautiful...they give this festival in this church, they do it even now...they gave...this year it was devoted to Berio.

ETZ:

Hm. Here's a picture with you with Petrassi and Heinz Holliger.

EC:

Heinz Holliger is another person, but he came later.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

I, uh, there again you were...in the decade after the war, I remember Helen telling me when we were on our way to Rome, she was talking about bopping around the, uh, the city in a, you know, a little motor bike and...how difficult many things were, even in the fifties.

EC:

Oh, yeah, they'd turn off, turn the water off or the electric light off at...random times. And...but it was a very exciting time to be in Rome and in Italy because, for one thing, for me...the thing that struck me then and it continues to strike me,...that Europeans, for many reasons, have a small section of people that are very enthusiastic about contemporary music and like many pieces, not only mine, but pieces of Boulez and Strokhov and the rest, and this is rather unlike our country, unfortunately. I've had much better luck in...Italy or in France and England and, to a lesser extent, in Germany.

ETZ:

Um, what do you, you know, without belaboring the point too much, what do you think of contemporary American culture and the place of music in it, and uh... Do you want to talk about that or would you rather...?

EC:

I'll talk about it, but not very...but very briefly. Well, I think that the great problem with American...(A) American culture is...is...not quite as coherent as European culture, it's a very, it's a very diverse thing, there are very many different sorts of things going on all the time in this country. And people talk about, for instance, about the lack of reception in contemporary music. This is really literally not true exactly. One of the things is that the audiences are very specialized audiences. This became very obvious, for instance, in the movies, that when I was young, there was Radio City Music Hall and Roxy, these enormous theaters that filled...that now have stopped and...and even rather small houses have divided themselves up into small bits. This is like contemporary music, and there's, you know, there's one audience for one thing and another one is for another. It's like that in the movies, you know, and I think it's the same. It's not that contemporary music has lost out, I think there are many more people that listen to it, even here than...than there were before, it's just that...that it isn't...it doesn't have the big audience like the Philharmonic has, but I think that eventually even the Philharmonic will....big orchestras will go the way that Radio City Music Hall has. It's a...it's...it's a

Library of Congress (Music Division)

division of the public....people have...different people have different tastes, we're all very individuals here. However, we don't...one thing that's different from American from Europe is that the Europeans thought that the radio was a means of education not of entertainment. And as a result, the government ran the radio, and in the case of England, for instance, Sir William Glock just played every...every contemporary piece he wanted to over the radio, over the television, over the radio, and as a result, there was quite a large audience that...developed as a result, and this is somewhat the same in Italy, less so in France, but it's true even now in France as the radio is very active. They gave two concerts of my music last year, an orchestra one and a chamber music concert in the same day. It's a...it's...just the government subsidy of radio and television...and with the point of view that it should be an educational rather than...well, I mean, it's partly entertainment...but a certain proportion of it should be...should be educational. It's something that we...don't quite understand in this country, even...WNET and the rest of them are getting more and more commercialized all the time.

ETZ:

There's a...I read a rather disturbing, um, description, if you believe in the possibility of radio and television to elevate and to educate, and so I read a rather disturbing description that what's actually going on is that the viewer or the listener is being sold to an advertiser, so it's...it's merely a question of can you deliver more bodies to whatever commercial venture is selling advertising. So it's...it's not even a question of entertaining people, it's a question of being a medium whereby, um, purchasers of products are brought to the sellers of products.

EC:

Oh, I've been very aware of that since my wife has not been well and we've had to...we've watched television more because...'cause she couldn't go out and...I feel that whatever you see on television is entirely organized by advertising, I mean, news has chosen to be sure that people will watch the commercial, so that you have a feeling that finally everything is being sold for commercial...it's very hard on the audience, it's very hard on the public that this should be happening. One had hoped that education...the education institutions in our country would teach people not to look at that sort of thing, and be disgusted by it.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Um, racing back to the fifties, that was a very productive decade. The end of the decade was your Second String Quartet, uh, which won you your first Pulitzer Prize...

EC:

Well, let me tell you about the Second String Quartet that was very odd. The Second Quartet was commissioned by the Stanley Quartet at the University of Michigan. And I was slow, I mean, I got into...I had talked, actually, to William Glock and I said, "What do you think I ought to do for the next quartet?" And he said, "Well, it ought to be shorter, for one thing." And so I said, "Well, OK, I'll write a shorter one," because the First Quartet's some forty-five minutes long, but this was going to be shorter. So, I took a lot of trouble over it and I was a little bit late for the Stanley Quartet and then, but they got it and they copied the parts, had a student copy the parts, and they decided they couldn't play it then and they were not sure they would be able to play it at all, so I finally...took the Quartet away and it turns out that by that time I knew the Julliard Quartet, especially Klaus Adam and Bobby Mann, and I showed it to them and they...they immediately said they wanted to do it. So they got the parts and the parts that the students had copied were full of mistakes and everything was wrong about them, so we had to have the parts copied all over again. But, at that point they took...they took the piece seriously, played it on a tour of Europe and played it in the United States and it won a prize. But, and they still play it, they played it this summer. I've had very good luck with those quartets, that quartet in particular, the Second. It's not too long and it's not so hard as the Third.

ETZ:

Which won you your second Pulitzer Prize in '73, I think it was.

EC:

That's right, well that was commissioned then by the Julliard School itself for the Julliard Quartet. That's the most interesting one I think, but nobody, uh...it's so...hard that it never gets played very much except...even the Julliard Quartet will play it now and then. Incidentally, my First Quartet was just played now in London by the Composers' Quartet, who...William Bloch was celebrating some anniversary in his...career, and they organized a concert...and...it's a wonder they had any room to play anything else on the program, it's so long.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Well, actually, I've...I've attended more than one, I think maybe three, different concerts where as many as you had written to that point were performed, and, um...I think that that's...that's a very interesting issue because not too many composers get that experience from a string quartet, to present the whole, um...

EC:

The...of course...we would...[videotape cuts out briefly]...play...a...play a stringed instrument. And...uh, I think the...end...there are a...there's (A) a practical reason and that is that a string quartet you can be sure that they'll rehearse enough to play it well if they're going to play it at all. And they're not paid by the hour the way an orchestra is to rehearse, so they're...when they decide to play this, they will play it and they will work at it until they play it well, and that's a very great import...to me that's a very important thing. And then the second thing is that you...that, you know, stringed instruments are so beautiful and they have such fine sound and they can mix together in all sorts of different ways and...it's fascinating. It's possible...of course, my...my...in a certain sense my quartets are all deconstruction quartets because it tends to keep all the players apart rather than together.

ETZ:

Um, and to cast them in different roles and have different repertoires of...

EC:

[Coughing].

ETZ:

Oh, I'm sorry, I hope I didn't give it to you. [Laughing].

EC:

No, it's my turn now. [Laughing].

ETZ:

Um, it's interesting to follow, you know, the train of thought in your development, too, um, and I was thinking myself as I said that about the populism in the forties, that, um, it seems to me that there's a very clear line in your music, that it isn't a rupture, um, and something that happened when you went to the desert in '51, but that there's this continuing line of development. And one of the things that I was...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Well...you have to say that the, for instance, the Cello Sonata, which we did...very clearly in, what do you call it a work between one...one type and the other, the Cello Sonata...

ETZ:

Like a bridge.

EC:

...there are some movements that show what's going to happen later and then other ones that...look like the past.

ETZ:

Yes, but it does have those forward-looking moments and it's...it's, uh...

EC:

Yes, it was the first time I ever thought of writing a piece that had what we called, what we called metric modulation, in which the different speeds are combined together in such a way that...and I think of them as having...as being like a keys in an old score, so that the first movement comes back at the end in the same speed and meanwhile all the way through the whole piece there are constant changes of speed, which took a lot of mathematics to get it all worked out.

ETZ:

And yet a person...a listener can just....

EC:

Oh yeah...I don't think...yeah...

ETZ:

...be very unaware of all of...this level...

EC:

Oh, of course, I don't want them to be aware...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Um, it's...and I find it fascinating to see some of the music that you were studying early on, um, for instance, this is your...

EC:

Well, let's say one thing, the...Scriabin works and Scriabin were very...to me, when I was a boy, when I was fifteen/sixteen, interested me a great deal because of their polyrhythms. You can see that here's a poly...a very complicated polyrhythm for five against three, but he's phrased it in such a way that it doesn't go...and you can see that I've written out how you...how these all go together. This was something I did, and here, another one, for instance, that...that I did when I was...in high school, these are the scores I bought in...I think this is, uh...the score of these Etude was bought in 1925, November 25th, 1925. And...I got very interested in poly...in this notion of polyrhythms that use five in the bass and nine in the other part, and...and, uh, this all comes out in my String Quar...in the...for the first time, actually, a little bit in the Cello Sonata, but, finally, the First String Quartet is just one riot of polyrhythm from beginning to end.

[break in tape]

EC:

...I've explained to you before that the...modern music of my youth was always in the back of my mind during this more or less populist period, was partly that I had tried to write...what I thought was modern music and it was kind of silly, and I felt I had to learn how to write music, and then I wrote the kind of music that I had been trained to write, more or less, that Nadia encouraged us to write...

ETZ:

Largely with Nadia, yeah.

EC:

...and then gradually, gradually I finally made this change around 1950, 1948 to '50, and it...but it was just simply going back to something that had been...been in my mind long ago, long before.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Sometimes I...think, uh, that...my feelings as a composer, it's like there are certain things that just started you with a fascination for certain things when you were quite young and they just, it just doesn't go away. Most people kind of grow up and go on to other things, but there are certain preoccupations that a composer has and...and I think you can, you could trace a very clear line. I mean, when you look at the Scriabin sonatas, which, by the way, were pretty hot off the press at that point...

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...um, of all the things that one might have been interested in...I recall the only time I ever was in a course where Scriabin was discussed, it was discussed in purely harmonic terms, but clearly what interested you was this...

EC:

Well, it did interest me harmonically, but not very much. I found it very hard to understand what the harmonic structure was at that time because I was trying to make it all come out in C Major or something, make it...find what tonality it was in, which I don't think you can find in the later works.

ETZ:

Yes, I agree with you. Um, but I guess that the thing that I find fascinating is that here we are seventy years later and you're...you're still, I mean, your interests of course, the level of sophistication is...is tremendously different, but there's...there's this fascination with something you were fascinated with as quite a young man.

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

By the way, that was before you heard The Rite of Spring, so...

EC:

Yeah, I think so.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

You were...it isn't that you...

EC:

No, no, that's true...

ETZ:

...started from scratch there and...

EC:

...it all happened, well, of course...Ives was full of that, too...the Concord Sonata is full of polyrhythmic things and all sorts of irregular rhythmic patterns. I...have around the house still the latest work that I bought of Schoenberg when we went to...when I went with my father to Vienna, which was Opus 25. I'm not quite sure what year that was, but I had, you know, I bought...the shilling in Austria was nothing...the cost...you could buy dozens of them for a dollar and I...I bought all the works of Webern and Schoenberg and Alban Berg that were possible at that time. You see, one of the big problems about this post...post first World War period was that there was a terrible...well, I don't know what you call it...devaluation of money, that...France cost nothing. I was able to live on about less than a thousand dollars a year in Paris. In fact, my parents...my mother secretly gave me a thousand dollars a year and Nadia asked for five hundred of it.

ETZ:

Ooo.

EC:

So that I...when she saw there was a hardship she said, "Well, can you pay me when you get...make more money?" But I had...to, you know, copy music and do all sorts of things to make ends meet in Paris, but it was easy, it was very cheap, I mean, you can imagine. And it was the same in Vienna. So that I bought large amounts of all of this music for practically nothing. In fact...there's the price of some of these on this.

ETZ:

Yes, in the old programs I notice, even in the States, the price of music was much more reasonable.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh, and I remember...for a while there used to be a big movie...a vaudeville house on 96th Street and Broadway on the northwest corner, B.F. Keith's. And I found a ticket for the vaudeville show. Five cents.

ETZ:

Hmm.

EC:

Unbelievable.

ETZ:

Was it a good show?

EC:

Well, I...yeah, well, I used to go there with my parents all the time. I'm sure it was a good show.

ETZ:

Um, you've mentioned to me before that also when you were in Paris it was...things were...it was very inexpensive to bind things, and so you have a wonderful personal collection of music that's bound and labeled and this is your Stravinsky.

EC:

Yeah, I had a lot of my scores bound. I had the feeling that things would go on the way they were and I wanted to have them not fall apart.

ETZ:

And it's a...

EC:

It has The Rite of Spring and Petrushka and Scriabin's Prometheus.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

And, uh, let me just show a couple of other pictures that I have of you with, uh, Stravinsky, because I think they're very, uh, they're...interesting in a lot of ways, but one of which, um, when you and I looked at these the other day, I had to take a second glance to realize they were ten years apart.

EC:

They're ten years apart, it's interesting, too.

ETZ:

Because it looks like you are carrying on the same conversation.

EC:

Well, they were both taken in the same situation and that is that Mrs. Stravinsky, who was a painter, had an art show...and...and not only that but then Don Hunstein of Columbia Records came and took pictures...so it was the same photographer.

ETZ:

And this is ten years later.

EC:

Yeah. Well, you can see it's ten years later if you were told that, but you wouldn't notice it.

ETZ:

I know. You'd have to know where to look.

EC:

So what period, is that '56?

ETZ:

This was '56, so this must be, you know, around '66.

EC:

Yeah, '56...'56.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

This one doesn't say. I'm taking the word of...oh, no I see '56 with a question mark.

EC:

It's hard to believe this was '56 because I don't think I would have known Stravinsky until '60. Since I...it was after the Double Concerto.

ETZ:

After the Double Concerto.

EC:

I'm not sure about that.

ETZ:

OK.

EC:

We think it's ten years apart. Maybe it isn't.

ETZ:

But it's a...as I say, I think the thing that interests me is that it seems like the two of you are continuing the very same conversation. Um, now we really, at this point, begin to, um, show a lot of programs beginning in Carnegie Hall, um, to major performances, like the Variations for Orchestra. And the Variations was 1955, was it?

EC:

Well, Variations was written...Variations began to be written at the American Academy in Rome when I was there in '53, or '54. And then when I came back I think I continued it. It may tell...if that's the manuscript, it may tell at the very end what the date was, I don't know. I used to do that but I don't always do that anymore. But...in any case...does it give a date?

ETZ:

"Rome, D'Orsay, New York – November 14, 1955."

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

The Variations was commissioned by the, well, it was one of the pieces, one of the many pieces, that was commissioned, not many of mine, but the only one of mine, that was commissioned by the Louisville Orchestra. And I wrote it, as I say, in New York and in Rome. And then it was played in Louisville in a gymnasium that was so resonant that I couldn't hear all that kind of stuff at all. It was...and I thought, well, my God, I must have done...made a terrible mistake writing all that...it had so much counterpoint and fast, rather intricate passages.

ETZ:

How was the first performance of this piece?

EC:

What?

ETZ:

How was the first performance?

EC:

Well, that's what I'm saying, it was in Louisville.

ETZ:

But, I mean, but in terms of...

EC:

They played it quite well, as a matter of fact, and the record that they have is still one of the better records of this, rather, recordings of this piece. The piece had...had...then was dropped for many years and then it had a resurrection in your Carnegie Hall, as I remember, played by Schulte.

ETZ:

Yes.

EC:

And it was...and...and Schulte made an overwhelming performance of it. It was...the audience was very enthusiastic and Paul Price was very enthusiastic and Mr. Schulte decided to take it on a tour of Japan and he placed Ives's Three Places in New England

Library of Congress (Music Division)

by my piece and when it got to Japan the Japanese press said that they never would...this piece never would have been played if I wasn't a relation of the President Jimmy Carter.

ETZ:

[Laughing]. Well, that's nice to find out, isn't it.

EC:

Schulte was furious about that.

ETZ:

Um, the first performance here in Carnegie was with the Minneapolis Symphony with Skrowaczewski. And that was in 1966.

EC:

Yeah, that's very possible. That brings up Skrowaczewski. Yeah, you're right, Skrowaczewski actually played it at Carnegie Hall and...I sat in a box with Arthur Rubinstein next to me. Because this was one of those Polish nights that everybody was full of... I had met Skrowaczewski, as a matter of fact, in Paris and I have a very strange story to tell about Skrowaczewski, that since I was talking about that First String Quartet and the fact that I couldn't accept the prize, it turned out that Skrowaczewski would have won the prize in Liege if I hadn't...if I hadn't...you know, if my piece hadn't been on the program, he was the second person. And he told me this after he had played a lot of my music and I told him, you know, you must have been a good fellow not to have been angry at me. He played...he also played my Piano Concerto, my...all the pieces up to a certain point, and then he hasn't done any since that time. While he was with the Cleveland...with the...

ETZ:

Minneapolis.

EC:

...Minneapolis Orchestra he played most all my pieces of the...of that period.

ETZ:

Um, yes, that was Shimanovsky on that program, too, I see.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh yeah. That was all modern music. Iberia, too.

ETZ:

Yes, it's...it's funny, I guess we don't think of Iberia as modern music, but it was.

EC:

Well, it was when I was...thought of that when I was young. Not now anymore.

ETZ:

Um, here's a performance of the Double Concerto in '69.

EC:

Oh.

ETZ:

With Paul Jacobs and Gilbert Kalish.

EC:

Yeah, well, they...recorded, the two of them, was that Arthur Wesbourg?

ETZ:

Yes.

EC:

'Course Arthur Wesbourg took the whole thing to Europe and recorded it in Winterthur in Switzerland. And unfortunately, the harpsichord, in the only record that is now available, the harpsichord is not as good as Paul Jacobs's. Let me talk about the harpsichord in the sense of that Double Concerto and the other little Sonata for harpsichord, flute, and oboe and cello. The harpsichord is an extremely problematic instrument because different makes are very different. I wrote it, actually, for an instrument that Ralph Kirkpatrick—in fact, he was the one that stimulated all of this—had, which had different registrations that are not now available. But what happened was that Paul Jacobs was so interested in those two pieces that he had a harpsichord built especially for those...to play on. It has sixteen foot and eight foot and all the different registrations that an older harpsichord

Library of Congress (Music Division)

had, besides being rather loud so you could really hear it quite well from a distance. These...when Paul Jacobs died he left them to the Yale

Museum...of Instruments with the understanding that they should be allowed to play my pieces. And they refuse. Last summer we had a performance of my Sonata and there's one coming up Sunday...up...uptown, and...and the Yale Museum is extremely difficult and I'm rather shocked because he had this very elaborate instrument built just for my pieces and...and they refuse to let anybody play them.

ETZ:

Why?

EC:

I don't know. In fact, they did a...they had a concert in which one of my pieces was played...by students and they allowed it to be played. But they allowed...they allowed the...they allowed it to be played by students who played one of my pieces up there. But they wouldn't allow Bard College to play it this summer at the arts festival or here on Sunday at the...at the concert of my music up...uptown. But there it is, that's the first performance.

ETZ:

Yes, of the...this is Gustav Meier and, uh, Ralph Kirkpatrick and Charles Rosen.

EC:

1961.

ETZ:

Yes.

EC:

I went to that concert with Varèse and he loved the piece. He was very enthusiastic. And then after that performance we went out and saw a movie called Shoot the Pianist. [Laughing]. And that's just what Ra...that's just what Ralph Kirkpatrick thought about Charles Rosen.

ETZ:

Charles Rosen. [Laughing]. That sounds like there must be a tale in that.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Well, there was...Ralph...well, the harpsichord...the problem with the piece is exactly that, that it's very hard to make the piano...I tried to write a light piano part so that it wouldn't cover up the harpsichord when they play together. In fact, they seldom play together in that piece because of that. The harpsichord is so different. The sounds dies so quickly on it that...things easily cover it up.

ETZ:

I've heard it performed with amplification, which is one solution.

EC:

Yes, we had...when we did...when it was done down at the Turin Festival, they had a...Finish harpsichordist that came out with the well-tempered clavichord on a t-shirt...and played it and they had...One of the problems with the amplification is if you don't put the microphone in the right place it amplifies the players...the musicians that are playing...that are accompanying the harpsichord. It's very tricky...

ETZ:

So, it...makes it worse.

EC:

It's very tricky to keep the oboe from covering the harpsichord when... So, in Turin, they shut the harpsichord completely and put the microphone inside. Unfortunately the Finnish pianist played beautifully but never in the right place.

ETZ:

Um, you must have heard...when you were in France though you must have heard a lot of those old Pleyels that they made that were very strong and, you know, they had sixteen-foot stops and they were very powerful instruments.

EC:

I heard, yes...I even went out to where Wanda Landowska lived, she gave concerts in her house out san Rue le Forêt or somewhere, and I went out to hear her. And then I heard her play, right here in Carnegie Hall, the De Falla concerto, which for five or six instruments and harpsichord, and I was sitting up there and you could hardly hear her.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Really? Um, I guess, when was the real revolution in harpsichord making and playing where they went back to the old models and...?

EC:

Uh...you mean, there are two. There was first the revolution of the early time of Wanda Landowska when they built big Pleyel pianos and they...

ETZ:

Yes, and to make them sound different than the eighteenth-century instrument.

EC:

Well, not exactly. There was a claim on the part of many people, there were eighteenth-century harpsichords that had a sixteen foot and two manuals and...I think that the Pleyel had seven or eight pedals that you could change. You know, in Casella's orchestration there are over a hundred different kinds of combinations of sound.

ETZ:

Yes, I uh...

EC:

But then this all began to...Now there's been a desire to go back to, as you say, to the old instruments, which were...so that gradually the pedals disappeared, gradually there were just hand stops that could be played on it if you weren't playing too fast or too many...both hands at the same time. And, uh, actually, when they play my...Sonata on Sunday, they have...they have a very...a good harpsichord that sounds quite like it. It misses certain things that I enjoyed so much to hear in Paul Jacobs' harpsichord. The idea, for instance, of having the sixteen-foot and the four-foot playing the same thing with the eight-foot playing on another manual in octave, so that only one is staccato and one legato. So you could do all sorts of things like that and make interesting effects.

ETZ:

Yeah.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

But you can't do that now. But it doesn't, I mean, it doesn't make that much difference because the piece still carries itself, but it'd be nice if you could hear things like that.

ETZ:

Um, before we get too far out of the fifties, I have a handful of pictures of you with American composers I'd like to...

EC:

Oh, yeah.

ETZ:

Actually, here's a picture of...we're talking about in the forties...this is Elliott Carter and Aaron Copland and Roy Harris. Isn't that Roy Harris? Yes.

EC:

I think that was when they had my exhibition of my things at the New York Public Library.

ETZ:

At the New York Public Library.

EC:

I think that was taken then.

ETZ:

It looks like it might have been, yes. Um, and here is a...this is a wonderful picture, I'm just going to give this right to you to put in your pocket when we finish taking this photograph. This is Elliott with...with, uh, Ruggles.

EC:

Carl Ruggles, yeah.

ETZ:

And this is...

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

The other man is James Sykes, who was a pianist and he played my Piano Sonata, as a matter of fact...at Dartmouth.

ETZ:

This was at '63, by the...what it says on the front.

EC:

Let me say about Carl Ruggles, that we, for a while, had a house at Dorset, which was not far from Carl Ruggles in Arlington. And he used to show, you know he was a painter besides that, and he used to show his paintings in...little art galleries and my wife disliked them very much, so that...but I always liked them. So at this time when we went to this visit, I decided I would buy one. Helen wasn't there and I thought... Well, I said to Carl, "You know, I'd like to buy a painting of yours," and he said...he said, "Well, which one would you like," and I looked at one and I thought, well,...and he said, "That one, if it was shown in a New York gallery would be something like fifteen thousand dollars," and I said, "Well, that's more than I can...want to pay." So, I found a little thing. "Oh, a card, I wouldn't allow you to get such a small picture." And so I went on and I never got anything.

ETZ:

At least you didn't have to give an explanation.

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

You know, we've talked about Helen a couple of times. I have...one of these pictures I took of you in '81. I think...I picked up a few on my way in here and I think these three pictures of you and Helen are kind of nice. This is...Elliott and Helen Carter.

EC:

Well, let me say about my Helen is that she was a sculptor and gave it up, actually, shortly after we were married.

ETZ:

I like this one.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

But she did a sculpture of Marcel Duchamp, it's in the Hartford Museum. They liked it very much and they asked...asked for it. And also she did the head of myself. It's in the...the Lincoln Center Library.

ETZ:

Let me give you this before something happens to it. It's such a precious picture. I've always thought Ruggles is an American composer that...that Ruggles...

EC:

I used to love Ruggles's music, as a matter of fact, and I guess I still do. Ruggles...well, I've known Ruggles's music for years and years. It's only that when we got up to Vermont that I began to see him. We actually had a great deal of trouble with him because he was extremely, um, right-wing and we were rather left-wing and we used to have terrible political arguments when we went to visit him and finally we didn't see him anymore because we couldn't stand it.

ETZ:

Yeah, that's sometimes the...maybe it's the coward's way out, but I've found myself in that situation. This is, uh, where was this, Elliott?

EC:

This was in Sneden's Landing, which is just...in New Jersey. Aaron had a house on...on the Hudson River up on the New Jersey side, uh, I don't know, about...it must be about twenty, thirty miles north of the end of New York City...on the other side of the river, after the Palisades stop a little bit and this sort of thing.

ETZ:

Here's Leon Kirschner, and Aaron Copland, and this...

EC:

And David Diamond is there.

ETZ:

David is there, and there's Elliott. And this fellow is...?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Well, that's the man I was talking about, that's Israel Citkowitz that I was telling you.

ETZ:

Oh, that had a studio here in Carnegie Hall.

EC:

Yeah, that's right.

ETZ:

Citkowitz, and in the back row, let's see, who is it? I don't know who this is.

EC:

Oh, I've forgotten.

ETZ:

That's Arthur Berger, isn't it? One of these is...

EC:

What? Arthur Berger is in that picture.

ETZ:

No, he's over here?

EC:

There he is.

ETZ:

Yeah.

EC:

Well, this is somebody I...those two people I've forgotten their names. But there's also Jerry Morosa is in that picture. I think that's he there.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

This is a nice...

EC:

But Aaron used to, you know, Aaron was extremely helpful to all of us. He was very...he did an awful lot for young composers and...we all liked him very much. He was a very good friend. He got me the job to be a music critic on a magazine called Modern Music and...he was very helpful. And then later, oddly enough, he started conducting my Holiday Overture, years later, when he went on tour. And he conducted it once at Tanglewood and old Mrs. Koussevitsky came up and said, "You see, it's too complicated." [Laughing].

ETZ:

[Laughing]. Oh well. Here's a picture, this looks like the Aspen tent with Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions.

EC:

Yeah. Well, let me say about Roger is that I took my ballet Pocahontas to him and he was quite enthusiastic about it and we became friends. And...of course I had known Roger's music, I knew that piano...the First Piano Sonata for years, and also Koussevitsky played his First Symphony, and so, I knew his music. And then we were colleagues when I was a composer-in-residence in Berlin in '64.

ETZ:

Well, that's when Montezuma was...?

EC:

And Montezuma was played...his opera...was played at the...I think it was the Deutsche Opera, I've forgotten, it was the one on Bismarck Allee. And...I thought it was very good, it had many things that were very beautiful about it. It was...it had a lot of problems in the sense that the Germans were a little...difficult about it, and they...built a very elaborate scenery which was built before the opera was actually played, so that some of it...it took too long, everything moving the scenery around took too long and so they had to cut out half the scenery in order...because the opera went on faster than it. And I always remember Roger used to explain that Mr. Zellner, who was the director...the stage director, at one point said, "Where is tranquillo on the stage?" [Laughing].

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

[Laughing]. Yes, I remember that. That's a wonderful, wonderful story. Um, although I must say, Roger's description of that experience years later, to me, when I was studying with him, was that the nicest thing about it was that they treated him like he was Wagner and he really enjoyed that...

EC:

Well, I mean, it was...there were...I think the opera has many wonderful things about it. It's never had a proper...well, it has...you see...A) it was translated in German and...the text itself is a text of, I've forgotten who, but one of those Spanish people that wrote at the time...and it's very fancy, it has very, you know, kings come and go, I remember that so well, Könige come and go and so forth. And...that makes...that's hard on the opera...the...the language itself is very murky, very old-fashioned and...that...that makes it difficult to...swallow.

ETZ:

Have you ever been tempted to write an opera?

EC:

What?

ETZ:

Have you ever been tempted to write an opera?

EC:

I've been tempted by many people to write an opera. Mr....Mr. Adler, who's out in California...

ETZ:

San Francisco.

EC:

...used to call me up every couple of years and ask me to write an opera. And now Mr. Barenboim calls me up all the time and tells me to write an opera. And finally,

Library of Congress (Music Division)

the...actually, oddly enough, the man who's come to talk about me, came to New York today to talk about it and he wants to see me tomorrow, I don't know why...

ETZ:

Is this Chicago Lyric?

EC:

In any case, Barenboim...the story of Barenboim was that when he played my Partita a couple years ago in Chicago he came up to me and said, "You know, I love your music, I would like you to write an opera for my opera house in..." what is it, Unter den Linden, now is that Deutsche Oper? I don't remember which it is. And...then after the third performance he came up to me and said, "Have you finished it yet? Have you written the first act?" And I said, "No, I haven't even thought of a libretto." And so then he kept at me and we went to Cologne and we had a performance there and each time, finally, I thought, well, I'll think of something. And so I thought, as a sort of joke, 'cause I wasn't so sure he was serious, and so I said, well, you know, I'll write a...I would...if I...I'd like to use a libretto of The Bald Soprano...of Ionesco. Well, that went on for a while and simmered and finally John...John Suskin from Boosey and Hawkes visited the Berlin Opera and said Mr. Carter would like to write an opera. It'd be a terrible libretto, frankly, but I thought the title was good for an opera. And...they said, "We don't want Mr. Carter to write an opera on anything but an American librettist. We suggest Woody Allen." But it hasn't gotten any further than that.

ETZ:

Woody Allen? Hm.

EC:

As a matter of fact, I've been lazy, I've been so busy with other things I haven't read any plays, but Woody Allen writes quite a lot. Apparently he's written a number of plays.

ETZ:

Of plays? I didn't know that.

EC:

I didn't know that either until someone told me. But look, Woody Allen, let me tell you about Woody Allen. Woody Allen came...when Ursula played my Piano Concerto at the Philharmonic, Woody Allen was there. And Harris and I went back after my Piano

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Concerto while Mehta was playing a symphony of Brahms, and Woody Allen wanted to come back and see us, but he was dressed in...and they wouldn't let him in. He was dressed in old Dungarees. And we were so angry when we found that out.

ETZ:

That's that's... [break in tape]

ETZ:

The Purple Rose of Cairo.

EC:

Yeah. There's a similar movie called The Icicle Thief in Italian that...that, uh, in which the characters try to get out of the television screen. They all bang on the tube in the back because they're so angry at having...they're showing a sad movie...showing a sad play about children starving and at the same time there are advertisements in between of children eating ice cream cones and all the starving children are watching the ad. And finally everyone gets so angry that... It's a crazy movie. It's a parody of The Bicycle Thief.

ETZ:

Yeah. It seems to me these different layers of reality have a certain interest though.

EC:

Oh yeah.

ETZ:

The thing in The Purple Rose of Cairo that is...

EC:

Oh, it's wonderful. It's one of the few that I really like very much. But that is very good, I think.

ETZ:

And the fact that when this one character does get out you see the sort of venality of the actors that they want to know what they're supposed to do next, you know. It has all kinds of implications.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Yeah. I thought that was very good. Yes it does.

ETZ:

Well, anyway, um, here's a picture of you with Roger Sessions.

EC:

That's in front of our house in Waccabuc.

ETZ:

That's '76. That's uh...that was a...

EC:

We have, actually...I have a picture on an old record of myself sitting in front of the house that that is.

ETZ:

Oh, in Waccabuc?

EC:

It's quite a nice one actually. On a record over there. It's an old LP.

ETZ:

Oh, yes, the old recording, I know. That was a beautiful house.

EC:

Yeah, well...I have that picture that was on that old recording here.

ETZ:

Did you sell it to somebody who would use that studio?

EC:

Don't talk about it. [Smiling].

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

OK, sorry. [Laughing].

EC:

We sold it to somebody... Fortunately we got quite a lot of money for it, which was the only reason. But it was a...crazy man who actually made an awful lot of trouble for us.

ETZ:

Oh.

EC:

And I think he's...people...we have never gone back because we don't want to see it. He's put a big fence around the whole place.

ETZ:

It had such character. I liked that house.

EC:

I thought so. It had a wonderful... We had a very funny experience. There's a Frank Schaeffer that's made a film about me. He's been making it...it's coming...it's still coming...it's still working. But he worked there. And he wanted to take a picture of me paddling a canoe and he got all of the television equipment in the canoe, and then... Dutch had never been in a canoe and they didn't know how easy it was to tip over.

ETZ:

To tip over, oh my! [Laughing].

EC:

And they had it and the thing was going like this and I kept thinking, "My god, all that equipment would fall to the bottom of the lake." And they had got the water dripping off the paddle. And it didn't...fortunately, it didn't turn out badly, but it was frighten...a very frightening moment.

ETZ:

I can imagine what it must be like in your case because I'm already inundated...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Yeah, it's just awful. Helen takes care of trying to keep the pictures in some sort of chronological order, but...

ETZ:

Well, this is Darius Milhaud and this is in 19...

EC:

That was when they played my First String Quartet in Paris.

ETZ:

In the 1960s?

EC:

Yeah, I don't know what date it is, 196...

ETZ:

It says "196," so it's something 1960s.

EC:

There was...used to be a picture of Nadia shaking my hand at that concert, but I don't know where it is now.

ETZ:

Yeah, I didn't come up with it. Here's Aaron Copland and Elliott and Leonard Bernstein. And this is a...

EC:

I like the back... I didn't realize I was mathematical as an infant.

ETZ:

Yes, there you go. This is a picture from the exhibit, um, in Lincoln Center, the New York Public Library in 1972, and this is one of the pictures we didn't get, which is...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

One of the things that one has to say is that...at that time I had most of my...I gave everything to my...to the...I was putting on deposit all my manuscripts in public library and I think they had this exhibit thinking they were going to get them. And when I sold them to the Sacher Foundation I took them all away so that.... That was only recently, but they would not have paid anything for it and I could get money for the other and I felt it was important to have money because one of the...not only for myself, but I could then help our cause, our musical cause, so that we've got enough money from Sacher to be able to help...performing organizations, tax-exempt organizations, that perform contemporary music.

ETZ:

Yes, it's a scandal that American artists aren't...not only are not encouraged to give their materials to...such as the Library of Congress or the New York Public Library or even Carnegie Hall, that we can only deduct the paper and the pencil.

EC:

Yeah, it's terrible, it's terrible, it's terrible.

ETZ:

It's a shame. Um, here's a program with the Chicago Symphony with, um, Sir Georg, who wasn't yet Sir Georg, Solti. The Carter Variations, Strauss "Don Juan," Berlioz Symphonie fantastique. That's a tough program.

EC:

When was that?

ETZ:

1972 here at Carnegie.

EC:

There was another performance of this by Lauren Mazel here, wasn't there?

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Um, well, I have down Variations with Solti. I don't think I have it with Mazel. With Pittsburgh, you mean, or...?

EC:

I don't know, because I remember...I remember that the big thing about that was that there was a performance by the New York Philharm...

ETZ:

Oh, he did it with the New York Philharmonic in like the '70s.

EC:

That's right, but there was another performance here on the same...at the same time... I had two performances once on successive days, or something like that, and the...I don't remember which is which, but the New York Times reviewed the one that was very bad, not the one that was very good. And I don't remember which it is. Now, there were two successive...and I was quite cross that they didn't cover the one that was really an excellent one. I don't remember whether maybe...

ETZ:

Now I remember, but I'm not going to say.

EC:

What?

ETZ:

I remember now, but I'm not going to say.

EC:

Yes, well I don't remember either. I mean, I remember vaguely.

ETZ:

I actually do remember, but I just don't want to say it for posterity.

EC:

Oh, you're quite right and I'm trying not to say it, too.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Um, but that was when the Chicago Symphony did the Variations here with Solti.

EC:

That's it, yes.

ETZ:

And that was, I'm sure, a very good performance.

EC:

That was a wonderful performance. Oh, it really was with...OK. Did you want to have this, I've lost it?

ETZ:

That's alright. Sometimes it's interesting to see what's advertised. There's a huge ad on the, uh, opposite page for Kent cigarettes. Um, which I suppose is better than all those corset ads in the '40s and '50s.

EC:

Yes.

ETZ:

Um, then there's a performance of your Piano Concerto with the American Symphony and Akiyama. Oh, I wanted to ask you, um...

EC:

Oh, who...did Ursula play that or doesn't it tell?

ETZ:

Um, I have it here, Samuel Lipman played it.

EC:

Oh, Sam... Oh, we have to talk about the Piano Concerto. Shall we...do you want me to talk about the Piano Concerto?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Yes, please.

EC:

The Piano Concerto, like those other pieces had its very great vagaries. It was commissioned by the Ford Foundation. First they gave...uh...Sam Lipman got a prize and he was told by the Ford Foundation to commission a composer that he liked. And I'd never heard of Sam Lipman but he...agreed to do...he said he wanted me to write a piano concerto. And so I...I finally called him up somewhere and said, "Do you know my music?" and it turned out that he did and so then I decided I'd do it. And then within two weeks the Ford Foundation called up and said, "How far have you gotten on that piano concerto?" and I hadn't written anything. In fact, I had other things to do and I couldn't write it for a while. The idea of this piano concerto was that it was...they would...that Ford...that not merely would Sam...would...what's his name? Jacob Leteiner...it's Jacob Leteiner that I'm talking about, not Samuel.

ETZ:

Yeah, I...it says here Lipman, but I think...I remember Leteiner, too.

EC:

Yes, it's Jacob, Jacob Leteiner was the one, yes, I'm sorry. But this story also involves...uh...no, Sam Lipman did play it, but, wait a second, yeah, Sam Lipman played it with Akiyama, but the beginning was with...

ETZ:

Leteiner was the commissioner, I think.

EC:

He commissioned it and the idea was that it would be played by a number of orchestras, like the Atlanta Symphony and the Omaha Symphony and some others. That was the idea. Well, I was very slow. I wrote it in...the first part of it in Rome and then I wrote it in Berlin. And finally I got it finished and I...and...Jacob Leteiner was out in Aspen and I went out to hear him play it and he said, "I've only learned the right hand of your piece, I don't play the rest." So, in any case, it was very hard for him to learn it, and it's a very hard piece, I think. And finally he did learn it. But then he got an engagement with...with Erich

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Leinsdorf and the Boston Symphony to do it and at which point the Ford Foundation was furious. They wanted him to play it with the Atlanta Symphony, they didn't want...their idea was to encourage modern music in remote places, so that they wouldn't put up a cent, they wouldn't do anything about it. They weren't gonna help pay for the parts and all that. They were very unsympathetic. Actually, Erich Leinsdorf liked the piece quite a lot and he raised some money to make a recording of it for the Bos...it was very helpful. But poor Jacob was...it was very, very difficult for him to do this.... he's a specialist in Beethoven sonatas...it was a hard...he had a hard time. And then later Skrowaczewski did it with Jacob in various places, did it in Berlin with the Berlin Philharmonic. And that was the maddest thing I've ever had. The Berlin Philharmonic, before the first rehearsal, told me, "You know, the publisher has sent the parts, but there's a horn part missing and a bass clarinet part missing. Now, in that particular piece the bass clarinet has a very elaborate part in one place. So, they said...my score was written in C...and the...they said, "Well, we'll have them copied. How would you like the bass clarinet transposed?" And I said, "Well you transpose it the way you usually did." And so the man transposed it so that the whole thing was...what is it?...up a major...a minor...a major second. And when it went into the g-clef it was still up a major second, which meant when you read...when the clarinetists read it, they jump down a ninth. So every time the clarinet went up he went down and I thought...at the last rehearsal before the concert, which was the first time I heard him play, he had a cold, I said, "Well, you can't play it this way, it's all wrong." And he said, "Yes, but I've learned it this way and I can't play it any other way." And that was it...and it was full of little things like that. It was a very unsympathetic, uncooperative thing. And...

ETZ:

And this was with Leinsdorf conducting?

EC:

What?

ETZ:

Leinsdorf conducting?

EC:

No, no, Skrowaczewski.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Oh, Skrowaczewski, I'm sorry.

EC:

He did it out in Minneapolis and he did...and then it was done...done in...Chicago. It was played a number of times...played...I mean... But then the other amusing thing was...to me it was amusing, anyhow...was they kept...the Ford Foundation in the early stages kept calling me up saying, "How far have you gotten on it," and also they said, "We won't put up more than a certain sum for the parts." It was small, it wasn't enough to pay for the parts. And the result of this was that another composer, maybe I shouldn't mention his name, wrote a five-minute piano concerto so the parts wouldn't cost any more than that.

ETZ:

That's interesting. What year was this? I can look it up here if you...

EC:

I've forgotten. It's quite early on. It was 1964...

ETZ:

1965.

EC:

Right, 1964 was when we were in Berlin.

ETZ:

So, even in 1965, which is not, I mean, was thirty years ago, um, you were able to...you were kind of lucky to get a commission that covered the copying? Or a composer might engage in a...

EC:

Yeah, but it didn't cover it completely because I knew perfectly well that when I got...if I wrote a piece that was twenty, twenty-five, thirty minutes long, which is what it turned out to be, that the parts would cost much more than they were offering. I don't remember what money is at this time, but...and I wasn't paid that much for it either. But it was...it was...the whole thing was ludicrous because they didn't understand the situation. And, you know, they couldn't understand why Jacob got a job with...with the Boston Symphony, they

Library of Congress (Music Division)

thought he ought to be down there in Atlanta playing the piece. And, you know, understand why Jacob got...if he could get a performance with the Boston Symphony, he won it.

ETZ:

Yes. Um...do you see a big difference between the composing world today and, let's say, thirty years ago even?

EC:

What do you mean by that?

ETZ:

In terms of the possibility for a composer to exist as a composer. Um...

EC:

I don't know what you're talking about.

ETZ:

I'm talking about money actually. Um, that the commission fees...

EC:

The commission fees are much higher. They are...they are...oh, much higher, yes. But the...one of the biggest problems of course, of all...[break]...lots of these pieces, lots of pieces get played once or twice and then they're finished...

ETZ:

Yeah, I know.

EC:

And that's awful.
[3 minute break in tape]

ETZ:

...this, I think, was from that exhibit we were talking about at the library.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Yes, that's right.

ETZ:

And here's a picture...

EC:

I'm scandalous, you know, sometimes...I...there was a party that Mehta did...a performance of a piece of Maxwell Davies. Incidentally, Maxwell Davies was a student of mine.

ETZ:

Yes, I know...at Dartington.

EC:

At Dartington Hall years ago. He did a piece, Mehta, and Boosey and Hawkes gave a party afterwards and I saw Mr....Mr. Mehta and Mehta said to me, they were going to play my Piano Concerto in a couple of weeks, and he said, "I'm going to spend the next two weeks studying your Piano Concerto," and I said, "That's not enough." And then I said, "My god, why do I say things like that." [Laughing].

ETZ:

[Laughing]. Oh... Um, didn't Bernstein record it?

EC:

What?

ETZ:

Bernstein, did he record the...is it the Piano Concerto or is that just the Concerto for Orchestra?

EC:

No, no, no, this is the Concerto for Orchestra. We can get the score and show them that.

ETZ:

Yes, I'd like to. Here's a ...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

So, but let me say that the Concerto for Orchestra...wait, maybe somebody can get it for me. It's enormously big, red...

ETZ:

It's right here. It's here. Here we are...

EC:

Oh, there we are.

ETZ:

Now if I can...since I dropped 1957, I don't want to drop the...

EC:

The Concerto for Orchestra was...and I've always...I must say that I usually...after my first...stay in the American Academy in Rome...I, for one thing, I was asked to become the director of it, which I refused, but I had always a chance to go back there as a composer-in-residence, I've been there maybe four or five times after that. And I've always gone there when I've had a piece like this to write so that...because there's no telephone and we didn't have...life was much quieter than it would be if I had stayed in New York. So, I wrote this piece and, uh, it was written at the American Academy in Rome and then part of it was written at the...at the Rockefeller Foundation in Bellagio. And you can see that, when you look at the score, what things there are to see. I mean, this is not simple to write that kind of thing...and, uh, I mean, I was talking to Boulez about things like this and, you know, he said that sometimes it takes you two days to write a page like that. Just to write it, I mean, not to compose it. And then, you know, then they rehearse it and everybody gripes and sounds awful.

ETZ:

Is that the piece of which Stravinsky said that he wasn't sure he could hear everything on page fifty-four, I think, or something?

EC:

That's right. Let's see where page fifty...it's something, I forgot.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

I think it was page fifty-four, I might have the quote here.

EC:

Maybe you've got...maybe you can... Yes it is. You're right, it was that. It's the end of... I think this is the piece. You know, I'm getting a little woozy, I've forgotten... I don't think it's fifty... Yes it is, it's the Piano Concerto, it's not this. It's the Piano Concerto because...

ETZ:

Hm, this letter doesn't specify.

EC:

Yeah...I've got every...every string instrument playing something different, little arpeggios and things. But this one's not...this is relatively...relatively transparent compared to some. But Lenny gave...Leonard Bernstein, gave this a performance and was quite enthusiastic about it. And then, as I was telling you before, later on, Boulez conducted it a number of times in different places. Once in Graz in Austria, I remember. And...uh, well...Lenny...

ETZ:

This is a picture of you working with Bernstein on it.

EC:

Lenny, well, Lenny made a recording of it and then...then, yeah, this is a recording session. How many...what is this?

ETZ:

And Aaron was there.

EC:

This is...what's his name...in the...from Columbia Records.

ETZ:

I don't know who that is.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

I've forgotten... There's one picture with Paul Jacobs sort of in the middle...in the end of it. And, anyhow, this was in the...oh no, it's not there, I guess we didn't bring it. But the...it was...

ETZ:

That wouldn't have been Goddard Lieberson, would it?

EC:

No, no, no. It was...he was one of...the sound engineer. I know who it was. It was the man who was the husband of that lady that sang, French lady that sang... I can't remember now. Rose somebody or other, for the moment.

ETZ:

Here's a picture of Bernstein and Copland and Carter.

EC:

You know, there was something very funny about that recording session. There's a...one of the rare moments in the piece where only two instruments are playing very softly. There's a percussion that goes [slaps leg] and then some other thing does that, and Lenny said...one follows the other...and he said that they'd been playing...that they'd made a mistake and played it in reverse. And then we all argued about whether when they hadn't played it in reverse, but you know how it is when two things are quite close together and you sometimes can't tell which comes first.

ETZ:

Yes, interesting.

EC:

And he heard it the other way around. And then I thought...well, they had no other tape that was any different and later when they had it on record it was perfectly alright.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Um, I'd like to talk a little bit about, uh...this is really racing forward...I suppose I should highlight some of the things we have in the archive here. Um, Robert tells me it took the computer a very long time to cough out all of the materials on Elliott Carter.

EC:

My god, I didn't know I had so much.

ETZ:

So, we've had to, you know, skim them down, you know, to a reasonable number.

EC:

Oh, sure.

ETZ:

But, um, just to give you an idea here, the Holiday Overture was your first performance here. Variations for Orchestra twice within about a six-year period, which is kind of remarkable. The Double Concerto in 1969 with the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble. The Piano Concerto in '75. Um, these are all in the Main Hall. A Symphony of Three Orchestras in '79. Um, do you remember that?

EC:

Arthur Weisberg.

ETZ:

Yes, I'm sure it was.

EC:

No, I was in Europe at that time. I didn't hear that.

ETZ:

It was one of the birthday tributes. Was that the year...? A lot of us have written birthday tributes to you.

EC:

You wrote a birthday tribute, but that was seventy...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Yes, I know. Maybe it was your seventy-fifth birthday, I don't know.

EC:

Yeah, that one, whatever it is, that...yeah, I guess it was the seventy-fifth.

ETZ:

But, uh, you've got quite a collection of these. We'll have to do something really big for ninety.

EC:

Oh yeah...Ollie Knussen wrote a great big thing called Coursing that's an orchestra piece for that birthday. And I've been...you know, I've been toying with the idea that we ought to get...I'd love to make a record...get a record made of a lot of the birthday pieces. Lutoslawski wrote a birthday piece for me. And Boulez wrote a piece for my eightieth birthday and he hasn't finished it yet and I'm eighty-eight now, called Dérive Second, Dérive Deux, Second Dérive.

ETZ:

Well, he's saving it for ninety, I guess.

EC:

He played...he actually played it here at the Carnegie Hall, played whatever he'd finished of it, I noticed. I didn't hear it. I noticed that on the program when they were here, when that ensemble was here a couple of years ago.

ETZ:

Um, and, of course, there's much chamber music. The Duo for Violin and Piano has been played quite a number of times.

EC:

Oh really?

ETZ:

Which is surprising as difficult and demanding a work it is.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

That's a hard one.

ETZ:

In fact, it was first done by...

EC:

That's one of my favorite pieces.

ETZ:

It's a...very interesting piece.

EC:

You're telling me. I think so, too.

ETZ:

It's been amazing that it has had a history that it has. I mean it's...it'd be wonderful if all of the violinists would want to play it.

EC:

Well, it's...you know...

ETZ:

But it's...it's, um...it's so demanding.

EC:

It's terribly demanding. It takes a lot of rehearsal.

ETZ:

And...it's, um...well, Rolf Schulte...

EC:

We made a good recording of it this summer in...London with Irvine Arditti and Ursula Oppens. But, also, Ole Böhn and Noel Lee just released a recording of it and, of

Library of Congress (Music Division)

course, Rolf Schulte and Martin Goldray have another recording. There are three or four recordings of it.

ETZ:

Well, isn't that interesting. A piece that is...has unprecedented demands and that it's been recorded and performed that much. Here's a picture of Ole Böhn.

EC:

Oh yeah. One of the interesting things though that is mentioned in a very recent article by Charles Rosen in the New York Review of Books is the idea that musicians really are the ones that make music develop, that it isn't the public, that it's the pieces...that Beethoven, he was all about Beethoven and I'm...Beethoven was encouraged by musicians and by the people, and that they told aristocrats to help him, but he wouldn't have been known if he wasn't such an interesting composer to musicians, to the musical...to the professional musical world.

ETZ:

I think that's true.

EC:

What?

ETZ:

I think that's true.

EC:

I think it's true, too. Not that I'm anything like Beethoven...God knows...but you're talking about this Duo for Violin and Piano and it will probably get around in time because people seem to like it. Performers like to play it after they've gotten through all of that.

ETZ:

And they play it repeatedly. Uh, I just wanted to say that Ole Böhn gave the New York premiere of your Violin Concerto here with the American Composers Orchestra under Michael Gielen in '91.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Michael Gielen has played many of my music...a great deal of my music, in Südvestfunk in Berli...in Baden-Baden, and he played it at a Barcelona festival he played a concert of my music, and then...and he's made a wonderful recording of a lot of my orchestra music, I think for some remote label in Switzerland...with the Südvestfunk Orchestra...yes, with Ursula, actually, he made a recording of the Piano Concerto with Ursula Oppens that was done with the Südvestfunk.

ETZ:

Um, the Night Fantasies is very much a case in point of the musician, um....

EC:

Oh, yeah, that's a hard piece.

ETZ:

...taking up the cause. And, as I recall, at the time that this was, you know, coming about it was commissioned by, uh...

EC:

By four pianists—by Ursula Oppens,...

ETZ:

Charles Rosen.

EC:

Charles Rosen, Gilbert Kalish,...

ETZ:

And Paul Jacobs.

EC:

And Paul Jacobs. And Paul, Paul Jacobs, made a good recording, which was only on long-playing disc. They've never re-released that. Ursula, I think, has made a recording for Arch and...whatever it's called. And Charles made a very good recording of it for EtCetera Records in Holland. And Paul made a good recording of it for...I think it was Columbia Records, no, for Nonesuch Records.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Well, I...I think something that was also very memorable about it is how they were fighting about who was going to get the first performance and...

EC:

Oh, yeah, well, they each had a first performance in a different place.

ETZ:

And...and they were...I remember a little bit of anger from performer to performer that maybe Ursula scooped them on a performance in Italy, or...

EC:

That's right. But then Ursula played it at the Metropolitan Museum place and...Alfred Brendle was there and he was so impressed by it and...he became a fan of my music, Alfred Brendle. He was always inviting me in London. You know, he never plays any modern music himself. Well, he plays the Schoenberg Piano Concerto, I think, but not very much else. But he always tells me how much he likes my music and that's nice.

ETZ:

Well, this is, uh, Night Fantasies was 1980?

EC:

I guess so. That was also written in the American Academy in Rome.

ETZ:

It's a wonderful place to write. I've enjoyed it, too.

EC:

Yeah, it is because you don't have the telephone, you don't have all this nonsense that goes on here.

ETZ:

Yes, although, I must say, they have a fax machine in the office now, so it's kind of like the beginning of the end. [Laughing].

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Oh, yeah. [Laughing].

ETZ:

But back to the point about the performers driving the history of music, which I really think makes a lot of sense when you look at the history of music in the past.

EC:

Yeah, I agree with you.

ETZ:

And, um, even things like the revival of interest in Bach by Mendelssohn, it was as a performer, you know, that this was done. And I think it is very remarkable and a very important feature about you and your work that this, um, the Night Fantasies seems to have found its way into the repertoire.

EC:

Well, we hope so, you know, you can't...who knows, it's the kind of thing that...life changes. I mean, look at a composer like Varèse. He's hardly ever played at all in America now anymore. He's played in Europe quite a lot, but in America we never get things like that. For one thing, they don't fit on the program. They're too...the pieces are too short and they require quite a lot of rehearsal. And then if you play a big thing like Arcana, it takes something like twelve percussion players. Allé did it in London and it was an extraordinary performance of it. But it doesn't quite fit and people don't...don't...since he died it's all sort of...it's faded away in this country. But I remember the same sort of situation with Mahler. There was a long period when nobody wanted to play Mahler because it required all those extra instruments all the time, such a big orchestra. And now it's all changed.

ETZ:

Yes, it's very interesting, um, I interviewed Morton Gould on this and he was talking about how Mitropoulos said that if you played Mahler you emptied out the hall. And we were talking shortly after Carnegie Hall had done a huge benefit with the Mahler Eighth Symphony and they would have a larger audience because it's Mahler. I think there's probably a natural ebb and flow, but, um, it's hard to know what's ultimately going to happen. But certainly it's very clear that...this is a very good example of your music kind of

Library of Congress (Music Division)

getting a foothold in the repertory. Here's a program with Charles Rosen who was one of the commissioners in a program...

EC:

Oh, yeah. He played...oh, that's right, he played it here.

ETZ:

He played it here on a program where he played two Chopin Nocturnes, the Chopin B-minor Sonata, your Night Fantasies,...

EC:

And something of Schumann, didn't he?

ETZ:

Schumann Impromptus on a Theme of Clara Wieck and Schumann Carnaval.

EC:

Yes, well, we always said that the Night Fantasies had a Schumannesque quality about it and usually pianists play it with that or the Kreisleriana or [?] .

ETZ:

But it's very interesting that this is, you know, in the...in the context of a...

EC:

Charles...he played it beautifully...the recording is beautiful. It's out of print, too. It's coming back, I think.

ETZ:

What label was that on?

EC:

EtCetera. And EtCetera failed in Holland and then somebody took it over and...but we're getting the record away from them and...and maybe Bridge Record will put it out. Because it was a beautiful performance. He has a sense of color that's something that very few other pianists that I've ever heard...a wonderful sense of different color and different touch.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Yes, it's a...it's a special intellect, I think, to...

EC:

Special, a very special thing.

ETZ:

And here's another performance, um, of the, um, Night Fantasies not too much later, uh, by Gilbert Kalish.

EC:

At Carnegie Hall?

ETZ:

Mm-hm.

EC:

I've never heard that. When was...I must have been...

ETZ:

1985.

EC:

I must have been somewhere or sick or something. I wasn't sick, though.

ETZ:

Well, if you had attended every concert that you've had at Carnegie Hall you would have hardly written any music in the last twenty years.

EC:

That's a fact. Don't say that.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Do you find that...that's a kind of peculiar twentieth-century issue...do you find that you have to balance the demands on your time vis-à-vis attending festivals and events and concerts.

EC:

Oh yeah, certainly. There was some kind of a festival in Brussels that I refused to go to. And then later they...had a...festival of my music in Moscow and I refused to go to that. I...you know, I saw that all this...it's not really the traveling to and from but is the getting ready to go and getting over it when it's over.

ETZ:

Yeah.

EC:

And...more and more I'm avoiding it. But I...there's a good deal of pressure on me to go to hear my Piano...my Clarinet Concerto in Paris in July...excuse me, in January when Boulez conducts it. And I want to hear it. I like to hear how the piece goes. Although, my impression is that often times the first performance is not really as good as it will be a number of times later. So that while I always want to hear the first performance, I'm often disappointed when, you know, the poor musicians are sort of groping around trying to find their way and it doesn't come out as well as it would be when they finally know what it's all about and how it sounds.

ETZ:

Yeah, I think that's true, too. Um, this is the brand new piece that you just finished last week?

EC:

Yeah, that's right.

ETZ:

And who is this for exactly?

EC:

Well, it's for L'Ensemble intercontemporain and Boulez is conducting it at the Cité de la Musique on January 10th and 11th and it's for the clarinetist of the ensemble whose name

Library of Congress (Music Division)

is Alain Damiens and he's made records...he's...that enormous clarinet work of Boulez, what is it, Dialogue de...something or other about ombre...I've forgotten what it is. And he plays wonderfully. He's a fantastic performer. But mainly, I've never heard him play anything but modern music, but he plays all that very well. Interesting piece of Xenakis for him.

ETZ:

How...how large an ensemble because the ensemble...?

EC:

Well, let's see, I think it's fifteen. It has five solo strings, one of each kind, four brass, four winds, and three percussion, piano, and harp. I don't know how many that is. They asked me to keep it low and then I'm going to have the problem making it fit a symphony orchestra and I'm not sure I'm gonna do it. Which means there are a lot of...for instance, I double the solo strings often with woodwinds so that they could be heard and...you know, that awful problem in the Schoenberg Kammer-symphonie where you can never hear what the strings are doing because the winds are playing. And I had to try and deal with that...and I don't like it. If I were writing for symphony orchestra I'd have the strings play and not be doubled. And I'm not sure that I like solo...solo violin and flute together.

ETZ:

Um, were you thinking of symphony orchestra while you were doing this and just...?

EC:

No, I was thinking of this. It's all worked out so that there's one movement in which the solo strings accompany the clarinetist for most of the time. There are sections where it's just like that and it sounds nice to have the soloist strings playing high notes or whatever, low notes, harmonics with the rest of it.

ETZ:

Mm-hm. I think there's probably a trend towards having ensembles break out of the normal "symphony orchestra."

EC:

But this particular ensemble that is the main core of the Ensemble intercontemporain, which can be up to thirty pieces, I wrote a Pentode for them, which has...what is it...five

Library of Congress (Music Division)

times four...there are twenty players, and that is a big piece and it's too big for them to tour. They can't take it on tour. They usually take a small group on tour. Well, they wanted the clarinet piece for something they could take on tour. So I kept it within the limits they suggested. I just added a tuba and I hope that doesn't keep them from taking it on tour. I have a solo for tuba...a duet for tuba and clarinet.

ETZ:

That has a lot of possibilities.

EC:

Way up at the top and way down at the bottom.

ETZ:

Is it a bass tuba or a...you know, the E-flat or B-flat?

EC:

Yeah, bass tuba.

ETZ:

Um, I think the whole concerto issue is something that interests me very much and I like the idea of smaller forces.

EC:

Oh, so do I.

ETZ:

And sometimes, you know, you hear these pieces that, you know, where if the orchestra plays mezzoforte you can't hear the soloist.

EC:

Oh, gosh...

ETZ:

I love the spareness sometimes in a...where you really hear the...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

Not only that but you can also hear the solo...individual players and if they're good players they really...it comes across in a way that when they're mixed up and when it's a whole string section it's... I'll never forget that when they played my Piano Concerto in Berlin...uh, what was his name...Wolfgang Stresemann, the man that was the manager of the orchestra, came up to me and said, "Furtwängler taught the strings how not to play together." And God knows he was right. [Laughing]. But it is true, Furtwängler had these entrances that were sort of staggered.

ETZ:

You know, Stokowski used to ask us to play what he called free bowing, which meant that he wanted to look back and see the bows moving in very different directions all the time and it was...sometimes it was very effective.

EC:

Yeah, I can imagine. It makes a good, sort of, smooth, very strong line that's very continuous without...and you can't tell where it...how it's phrased. Yeah, I can see...

ETZ:

It had some...it had some things to be said for it, but, um, I think probably it was more of a gimmick than anything else.

EC:

You're bringing up a subject that comes up to my mind. When my Holiday Overture, I'll go back to that, was going to be played by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony, and Fritz Reiner was not far from where my parents lived in Westport, Connecticut, and I went over to see him. And he sat down at the piano and played my piece as if it...I've forgotten...he played it as if it was all in C, which meant it was...all the instruments were transposed so that everything was... And he said, "Is this the way that you want it to sound?" And I said, "Well, I thought, Mr. Reiner, you could transpose." [Laughing]. In any case, he told me something...that what you were talking...that piece was rather... that piece was rather heavily orchestrated and there are large numbers of places where the strings and the woodwinds play in unison. And he said to me that it's much more effective when one of the other...of the other plays more softly, that you have the strings playing loud and the woodwinds playing softly. And he said...and he showed me. He went through the piece

Library of Congress (Music Division)

and said, "Now at this point I'm going to have the woodwinds come out and have the strings go back and then they...gradually there's a crescendo in one and a diminuendo in the other. I'd never thought of that before and it's a very interesting idea.

ETZ:

It is.

EC:

I don't use it myself, but I can see that...

ETZ:

I think it's kind of a player's trick in a way because I remember when I was writing my Flute Concerto and I was very concerned about balance, Jeannie Baxtresser, you know, the principle of the New York Philharmonic, pointed this out to me. That if she's playing in octaves, let's say, or in some competitive passage with another woodwind, if the other player is playing with a more cool sound, let's say without vibrato, and she's playing with vibrato or like one dynamic level under, it makes a tremendous difference. And the...the, uh, part kind of really coming out of the mix.

EC:

Yeah, it comes more...it gives it much more life. I realize that. I could see, well, you know, when you have the strings and woodwinds just all playing one line like that, it is much less interesting and lively and it seems to be dull, it seems to be routine. But if you have...begin to have these changes, it makes a lot of difference. Something...I don't double up anymore much anyhow, so I don't think about it. But in those early pieces I wouldn't...I never knew whether I should write it in the Holiday Overture or not, but I decided to let the performer...it's a problem the performers should solve, in my opinion.

ETZ:

Yes, and sometimes if, um, if composers try to solve their problems, like the issue of having different dynamic levels where the end result you want it to be the same, uh, that can get very dicey. Performers can get very confused about this and not be quite sure what it is they're supposed to be doing.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Yeah, and then I find also that there's another problem that performers...if the music is sort of exciting they all play loud no matter what you write.

ETZ:

You know...

EC:

The more exciting it is, the louder they play, and sometimes, you know, I remember that my...that man that I was talking about, Nicolas Nabokov, said, "There's nothing more beautiful than a tutti played pianissimo." You try and get it out of an orchestra.

ETZ:

Yeah, it's not easy, I know. But you know that the most exciting performance of The Rite of Spring I ever was personally involved with was with the American Symphony and Markevitch. And Markevitch conducted that thing like it was a Mozart Symphony and we had to play under the dynamic level and he didn't allow us to get excited. And it's a terribly exciting piece to play. You know, you could just really...

EC:

Oh, yes, and you're always having to count all the time, too.

ETZ:

Yes, and he was just meticulous about the accents and "no, it's not on the first of the bar, it's on the second eighth note of the bar." And it was just...the approach was just very surgical and it...for me it was the most exciting performance that I had ever been involved with...that it didn't allow us to sort of...

EC:

Igor Markevitch was in my counterpoint class with Nadia Boulanger.

ETZ:

Really?

EC:

And the first lesson that I remember was that we all brought counterpoint in and so Nadia would play it over on the piano...and she played over, not mine, but some more advanced

Library of Congress (Music Division)

student, a four-part counterpoint and made Igor go down to the other end of the room and he came back and played it all perfectly, just by having heard it once and by ear. And that's not easy for four-part counterpoint. After that, we all felt we ought to pack up and go home. [Laughing].

ETZ:

[Laughing]. Well, oh, I know what I want to ask you and I never have. Um, were you involved with the preparations of the materials for the Ives Fourth Symphony?

EC:

Oh my god. No, what do you mean, the...the orchestra parts?

ETZ:

Yes, I know you had done work on various pieces of his trying to help get it at a performance...

EC:

No, I wasn't, but my editor, Kort Stone, was very involved with that. He was the one that made the edition that...that first came out with Associated Music Publishers. It...the parts of the Ives Symphony...a lot of them were absolute messes.

ETZ:

Oh, I know. I didn't play in the premiere of the piece, which was Stokowski and the American Symphony in, I don't know, maybe 1965. But I...a couple of years later in the orchestra I played a performance of Ives's Fourth Symphony and even then, you know, the parts were...

EC:

Well, the parts were published...were copied by that library that used to copy parts in Philadelphia...I've forgotten...

ETZ:

The Fleischer?

EC:

What?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Fleisch...Fleischer Collection?

EC:

Something like that, Fleischer. Now, I'll tell you about the Ives Fourth Symphony. We...I knew a lot of it because Ives gave me photostats of a lot of the score. Well, there's a printed version of the second movement...and Ives...Ives gave me things except the last one, which I did...I saw...the manuscript was a mess, it was all scribbles. I thought that was very interesting and I was at Baden-Baden in 19...whatever it was...19...it was before that was played in New York. And Rosbad conducted the Schoenberg Variations and lots of things and I went up to him and said, "You know, there's a very remarkable piece of Mr. Ives that only you could play here because you have..." they have unlimited rehearsal and he's a very...he's a wonderful conductor...

[break in tape]

EC:

And when I went to the Academy in Rome I had the printed score that Ives had paid for that had been printed in New Music and I showed it to the...I've forgotten, Signora Bertelli, or someone at the Italian radio, and they were very interested. They wanted to play it immediately...it was not like, you know, you don't get that in America, that the minute they saw it they said, you know, we've got to play it... So they ordered the parts and the parts were a complete mess. The RI...the Italian...do you know...?

ETZ:

RI, yeah, yeah.

EC:

RI, can I say that? It doesn't mean anything anyhow. The RI had to have all the parts copied over again. And then they did it and Petrassi came up to me rather angrily and said, "This is just realistic music, no spirit to it."

ETZ:

Really?

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

And you can see that. There's some truth to that.

ETZ:

Oh my. Well, let's see, is there something that I should be mentioning that I... I guess there's been this escalation in...

EC:

Oh, we haven't talked about...oh, no, I guess you can talk about any old thing, I don't care.

ETZ:

What's that?

EC:

I've written these four...I've written a Fifth Quartet that was commissioned by the Arditti Quartet that was played in...first gave its first performance last year in Antwerp. We went to...Helen and I went there. And then they played it...played it in Paris. And then they played it here and it got a lousy review. It got very good reviews everywhere else.

ETZ:

Well... How do you feel about people writing reviews of your music?

EC:

Well, you know, it...it's always unpleasant to get a bad review, but, on the other hand, you always feel that they don't know what they're talking about if it's a bad review.

ETZ:

Yes.

EC:

And I must say some good reviews I'd think that same thing about.

ETZ:

Think the same thing about. Um, I want to point out one nice coincidence that I think illustrates this theme of the, um, the fact that things have stuck. Um, here, in February 1995, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra played your Symphony No. 1.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

That's right.

ETZ:

Um, which is from the forties. And in, um...

EC:

I wrote that in Santa Fe in '41, I think.

ETZ:

Yeah, so it's a really early piece. It's probably one of the earliest pieces that you still acknowledge.

EC:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And then also in '95, in October, the BBC Symphony did that marvelous performance of Adagio Tenebroso...

EC:

...Tenebroso, yeah.

ETZ:

...which is a quite recent...

EC:

That was written for the BBC, of course.

ETZ:

But it's nice to see that back-to-back, you know.

EC:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

But it's interesting that that First Symphony right after the war...Sir William got lots of performances in England. It was played over the BBC and then orchestras all around. And I...I complained about it. I said, "You mustn't...that's not characteristic of my music anymore. Don't play that anymore, play something new." And so they...they did that. That was nice, I thought.

ETZ:

Um...

EC:

Incidentally, it was played...I had a festival at Hunters...Huntersfield festival, which is north of London. And it was played on the same...José Serebrier conducted it and it was played on the same program with the Gershwin Piano Concerto and people liked it better. It got a bigger hand. So, there you are. Who knows? Are you going to mention Conlon Nancarrow?

ETZ:

Well, I guess, yes. This is something that was missed.

EC:

Conlon Nanc...Conlon...Conlon...because one of the problems always is that people say that I got all that polyrhythm from Conlon when I was doing it back in the...years and years ago. And Conlon was a good friend of mine in the, eh, right after the Spanish Civil War where he had fought...and we saw him often. And then when I wrote my First String Quartet I went down to see him in...in Mexico City and he, at that time, had just started to write player piano music. And he used to send us all, both Aaron Copland and myself, a great deal of those tapes of piano music, player piano music. And I remember trying to give a class at the Juilliard School about them and the students just hated it, they thought it was nonsense. And...and I was rather miffed by that and Aaron and I got Columbia Records to make a record...it didn't sell. And then John Cage picked up one of his pieces and added it as a background for one of Merce Cunningham's ballets and, from that time on, Conlon Nancarrow became a great cult figure and everybody liked him very much. It just changed like that.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

It's...that's kind of remarkable, isn't it? And, um, to the extent that now people are transcribing the piano roll music for acoustic instruments to play...

EC:

Yeah. But it was...I mean, I...I like it but I don't think it's that great either.

ETZ:

Yeah. But it's interesting how suddenly something becomes very...

EC:

And it was all because of John Cage, who had, of course, a special kind of large following.

ETZ:

Well, I, um...

EC:

Do you think we've finished?

ETZ:

We're pretty close. I just want to ask you what you're writing now or if you're...you know, your next piece.

EC:

I'm writing a quintet for the Arditti Quartet and Ursula Oppens. They've been after me for years and I decided I'd do it.

ETZ:

Oh, that's nice.

EC:

It's kind of complicated. The problem with the...how to get the piano to sound...you know to fit in with this string quartet is an interesting problem, I think. One dies...one the entire...sounds die on the piano and the others get...can be loud and soft and can swell, which you can't do on the piano. Well, you can give that impression, though.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

ETZ:

Well, I'm sure it will be a unique solution.

EC:

Yeah, I wrote a quintet for winds and piano for Heinz Holliger. I want to say, let me talk a little about Heinz Holliger, who has been... It turned out to my utter surprise Heinz Holliger had been playing and teaching my pieces in...his classes in Freiburg, Germany. And I never...I didn't know him at all. And...and he got Paul Sacher to commission a...a oboe concerto from me and...it gets played all the time. He's played it all over the place and then he played it with the...with the San Francisco Orchestra and he played it here, I think, in Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

He played it right here, Carnegie Hall, 1988, uh, Herbert Blomstedt conducting the San Francisco Symphony with Heinz Holliger.

EC:

And now there are other clar...other oboe players are playing it: Garris Holz in Germany...in England and a man named Hannady. But a lot of other oboe players are playing it now. It's quite demanding. And it has...it has that awful thing, the worst thing you can do...it ends with it—the oboe plays the highest note and jumps down to the low B-flat. That's the end of the piece...it's the last three...it's...then there's one more note and that's the end of the piece, you know, I thought a lot of the way tenors do, shriek and then...and... And Heinz doesn't make...he can make...he can make it with a slur.

ETZ:

He's pretty scary, I mean, he's quite remarkable.

EC:

Well, he's pretty scary, he's a scary guy, you know. He wrote a piece for my eightieth birthday, an opera on a Beckett...a Beckett play called What Where. The entire score is below middle C. It's five trombones and some bass and...bass... And it's real scary. The man says, "What...Where," and then this growl, growl, growl. [Laughing].

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Well, Elliott, it's been wonderful pleasure to...

EC:

It's been a pleasure for me, thank you.

ETZ:

...get some of these reminiscences on our videotape. And it's...to me, part of the magic of a place like Carnegie Hall is this sense of continuity. I mean, I could see you fifty years ago coming here and, uh, it's...when Carnegie Hall was quite young, you know, seventy years ago, hearing *The Rite of Spring* and, um, over the years, the fact that so much of your music has been performed here and, um, I have a kind of mystical feeling about concert halls, that there's...it's all kind of still there somewhere, sort of in the...in the air.

EC:

One of the problems, though, is that it seems so hard to have good acoustics in a concert hall. It's very, very, I mean, I...I don't even know whether it isn't a matter of personal feeling about this, but it's very disturbing. I mean, for years in Fisher Hall, for instance, we couldn't hear...we couldn't hear the basses very well and then all of a sudden all you could hear was basses. Here there's a change, an enormous change since they redid it. We know the man that...worked on this, Byard...Byard somebody, and he...he was very serious and tried very hard to get it right, but there are some strange things about this, too. But I think there always were but I never noticed it until later...until later in life. At first, you know, the music was so...I listened so intensely that I didn't think about what I...about the acoustics of the hall.

ETZ:

It sounds really, really good now. Um, and I think one of the big differences from hall to hall, for instance, Philharmonic Hall or Avery Fisher Hall, when you sit on the stage, if you sit...if you move your chair as a performer two feet away, you hear things very differently. And the wonderful thing about Carnegie Hall is that wherever you sit on the stage you hear what's going out.

EC:

Huh. Well, that's very important.

ETZ:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

So, it gives musicians the control, you know, over what they're doing and the ability to hear.

EC:

The thing that I find so sad is that there are so many halls that are so poor acoustically.

ETZ:

I know.

EC:

And here these people work so hard to play these pieces and practice and rehearse and all that and then you get out on the stage and it doesn't sound right and it's all...it's something terrifying and terribly depressing sometimes. For instance, Royal Philharmonic Hall is an odd operation, I think.

ETZ:

I agree.

EC:

And...well, actually, the halls in Vienna are very good, I suppose...

ETZ:

Oh, the old...the Musikverein and the...

EC:

The old...the Musikverein is one and then there's the...Konzerthaus.

ETZ:

The Konzerthaus.

EC:

Those are all good, I think.

ETZ:

Excellent halls, yeah.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

EC:

The radio hall thing in Paris is awful and...they say the Cité de la Musique, where they're going to play my Oboe...my Clarinet Concerto, is...better than the... I...but Barenboim played my Partita in the Châtelet and that was terrible...awful.

ETZ:

Yes. Well, anyway, it's been a very important part of American culture that you've had this relationship with Carnegie Hall and it was very nice of you to come and give us so generously your time and your thoughts today.

EC:

Well, good. Thank you very much, Ellen.

This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at www.loc.gov