Music at MIT Oral History Project

Linda Solow Blotner

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

May 17, 2010

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library

Transcribed by MIT Academic Media Services and 3Play Media.
Cambridge, MA
Transcript Proof Reader: Lois Beattie, Jennifer Peterson
Transcript Editor: Forrest Larson
©2013 Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library, Cambridge, MA

Table of Contents

1. Family and early musical background 1
Father self-taught pianist—piano lessons at community music school—playing flute in high school marching band and orchestra—cello lessons with Ruth Alsop—flute lessons with Sophie Schultz-Sollberger—piano and flute repertoire

2. Musical education and career decisions..6
Bachelor's and Master's degree in music at Brooklyn College—working in the Music Library at Brooklyn College with Walter Gerboth—first exposure to contemporary music with Paul Jacobs—playing timpani in student chamber music group—fondness for percussion—exposure to "early music"—Jean Hakes, New York Pro Musica—master's thesis on Baroque composers and organ settings—Gustave Reese seminar at Harvard University—early memories of libraries—decision to become a librarian—on choosing University of Michigan for master's of library science degree—William B. Weichlein

3. First professional library experiences 14
Harvard's Fogg Art Library—Virginia Cunningham—Katherine "Katy" Creelman-Scrobela—AACR2—music cataloging—Library of Congress—David Ferriero—MIT Libraries' syndetic structure—indexing versus cataloging

4. Music Librarian at MIT, 1972–1984 19
Klaus Liepmann—appeal of the MIT Music Library—change from "music lounge" to "music library"—consolidating card catalogs—adoption of Library of Congress cataloging rules—Ligija Neibergs—Sarah Gramenz Mitchell—Howard Kennett—revamping the vision and purpose of the MIT Music Library—MIT music faculty: Klaus Liepmann, Marcus Thompson, Barry Vercoe— Boston Area Music Libraries: Harvard, MIT, Wellesley, Boston University music collections—Mary Lous Little—jazz collection, prompted by Mark Harvey—Council for the Arts at MIT—The Boston Composers Project—Jay Lucker—Norman Dello Joio—Gunther Schuller—Gerry Ostrove—Mary Davidson—Natalie Breed—Ruth Bleeker—Boston Public Library

5. Music Libraries and digital technology 30
Taiga Forum statements—transition from card catalogs to digital environment—music libraries' differences—preservation and archiving concerns—Peter Munstedt—Virginia "Ginny" Danielson—Michael Gorman quote

6. Musical activities in retirement..33
Marcus Thompson—Boston Chamber Music Society—Chamber Music America—MLA Publications Committee—music interests—Hartt School of Music Board of Trustees

Contributors

Linda Solow Blotner was MIT Music Librarian 1972-1984. Worked to expand the Music Library collection to meet the needs of MIT's growing music program, especially in chamber music, scholarly editions of scores and books for research. .She was editor of *The Boston Composers Project* (1983), an extensive bibliography of contemporary music by Boston area composers. Nationally she was active in the Music Library Association, and has served as editor of their journal Notes. From 1987-2007 she was head of The Allen Memorial Library, The Hartt School of Music, University of Hartford.

Forrest Larson, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library, has attended training workshops in oral history methodology and practice at Simmons College and by the Society of American Archivists, and is a member of the Oral History Association. He is also an active composer and violist.

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on May 17, 2010, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:54:16.

Music at MIT Oral History Project

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers, and scholars.

Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the *Music at MIT Oral History Project* is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

1. Family and early musical background

LARSON: It's my honor and privilege to welcome Linda Solow Blotner for this interview. It's May 17, 2010. I'm Forrest Larson, and we're in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Thank you so much for coming today. It's just so great to have you.

You were the Music Librarian at MIT from 1972 to '84. And then after that, you were head of the Allen Memorial Library at the Hartt School at the University of Hartford from 1987 to 2007. And you've had quite a distinguished career in music librarianship. In 2009, you were awarded the Music Library Association Citation in recognition of your career-long distinguished service to music librarianship. So can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

BLOTNER: Well, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and that's where I grew up. I was there for the first twenty, twenty-one years of my life before I went to graduate school.

LARSON: Okay.

BLOTNER: So I went to the city school system. I went to Midwood High School. I went to Brooklyn College for bachelor's and master's. And then I went to the University of Michigan for my library degree.

LARSON: So we'll get into the schools there. So may I ask what year you were born?

BLOTNER: 1947.

LARSON: Wow. So can you tell me about your parents, their professions and their interests?

BLOTNER: Well, my parents weren't professionals. My mother, in fact, was born in Poland and came to New York when she was about three years old with her family.

LARSON: Now what was her first name?

BLOTNER: Fay, F-A-Y. And so she grew up on the Lower East Side in Manhattan. And my father was born in Manhattan on the Lower East Side. And his parents were from Russia. My mother's family was from Poland.

LARSON: Uh-huh. And your father's first name?

BLOTNER: Nathan.

LARSON: Nathan.

BLOTNER: And so they pursued what most people did in those days. My father had an assortment of different jobs. But he was a fabulous auto mechanic, actually, and during World War II was the supervisor at the Air—Floyd Bennett Airport, that's it, the military base, supervising all the planes before they took off for combat in Europe. And my mother eventually became a bookkeeper after my brother and I, you know, were old enough.

LARSON: Uh-huh.

BLOTNER: So—but very supportive of education.

LARSON: So you mentioned a brother, or—

BLOTNER: Mm-hm.

LARSON: What was your brother's name?

BLOTNER: Jay, J-A-Y. And he's two and a half years younger than I am. And he became a lawyer. He works in Westchester with the Legal Aid Society. He's one of the assistant supervisors.

LARSON: Is he musical at all?

BLOTNER: Not at all.

LARSON: Ah. [laughter]

BLOTNER: He took the required music 1 class at Brooklyn College. He also started there. And that was it.

LARSON: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Are there other musicians in your extended family?

BLOTNER: Well, my father was very musical. He played piano by ear. One of my aunts was taking piano lessons, and he'd kind of hide around the corner and listen in on the lessons. And he also was given violin lessons. But he much preferred the piano.

And he had a really great ear, so he could pick up any tune, and he'd make up his own accompaniment. And after he retired, wherever he was, if there was a piano, he'd sit down and entertain whoever was in a little cocktail lounge or, you know, restaurant or whatever. And people liked it.

LARSON: Uh-huh. So what kind of music did he play?

BLOTNER: Popular tunes from—from his generation, popular. I mean, he died about twenty years ago, so. But it was just all the tunes they remembered from the 30—their 30s and 40s and 50s.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Did he play ragtime at all?

BLOTNER: Some of the tunes, but not in that style. I don't think he had enough of a musical education to know exactly what this style was or that style was. He just kind of imitated things he heard and played what suited him.

LARSON: Did he ever play in any bands or anything?

BLOTNER: Oh, no. This was just him sitting at the piano with my mother singing along occasionally.

LARSON: Yeah. Tell me about some of your earliest musical memories from childhood.

BLOTNER: Well, one of the first was connected in a way to—it wasn't a concert, but when I was about eight years old, my mother and one of her friends took me to *The Nutcracker* suite, the ballet performance. And we were sitting quite—if not first row, second row. So I could see right down into the orchestra pit. And I was about as interested in the orchestra pit as the dancing onstage. [laughter]

And I was just enchanted by the harp. And so I kept saying, well, can't we get a harp? We'll take a harp—you know, we'll get a harp at home.

And my mother kept saying—we lived in an apartment in Brooklyn. She said, well, where are we going to put a harp? Well, we could put it under the piano, I said, having no concept of, you know, anything like that.

But when I was about eight years old, they did get a piano, a very small—like what they called an apartment-sized baby grand. And which fit very nicely into one corner of the living room, and so I started piano lessons. And I remember after—well, my first lesson went really well, learning the key of C. And so that was fine.

But my second lesson, I got a piece in F major. So there was that B-flat. And I went home to practice, and I just couldn't remember to hit the B-flat.

So you know what it sounds like when you hit, you know, the B and not the B-flat in F major. And I was getting so frustrated that I announced to my parents that I was going to quit. Piano wasn't for me, and that was it, and I couldn't do this.

And they convinced me to just try it for a little longer. And luckily, they did. And so I continued, and I took piano lessons through my master's in music, actually.

And so, the piano lessons I took were at one of those neighborhood music schools. But this happened, it was only a couple of blocks from our house, which made it easy. And this really was a wonderful school.

It was a couple. And the husband, who was a cellist, had played with the NBC Symphony, I think. And his wife I think was born here, but she had this kind of European flair and was—was kind of strict in a way.

So every—there were about six or eight of us who were her students. You didn't get to be her student right off. You started with the lower level teachers. And then after maybe three years, those that seemed to have additional promise, musicality, whatever, would graduate to the pianist who was co-owner of the studio. And she was very intimidating.

There was a group of six or seven of us, one guy, and the rest of us were girls around the same age. So by this point, we were probably all twelve and into our teens. And so we'd have our private lessons.

But on Saturdays, we had to come for first a class in music theory with someone who also taught, probably, I don't know, adjunct or part-time at some of the colleges, and then a piano ensemble class, where we played—she had two pianos in her studio. So there were all sorts of combinations with four people and two people and so forth. And so that was our Saturday mornings.

And when I got to Brooklyn College in my first music theory class, I learned—and some of the other girls in this Saturday class also went to Brooklyn College, so we were together. The teachers there were always astonished at how much basic music theory that we already knew coming in there. And so we kind of breezed through a lot of that.

So—but then along the way in high school, I also studied flute, and I took private lessons, and I played in the band in high school, marching band and concert band. And then I think by my senior year, I was taking cello lessons, although that

wasn't—that was class, which I continued in college, and managed to play a few, you know, [Benedetto] Marcello trios. Sometimes I was piano, sometimes I was cello.

But by the time I got into graduate school, I basically—I stuck with flute, pretty much. I was playing in orchestra in high sch—in college. So I stayed with flute. But I always kind of considered piano the more rewarding instrument.

LARSON: Uh-huh. Can we backtrack a little bit? The name of the—

BLOTNER: Yeah, sorry.

LARSON: The community music school where you took piano, what was that?

BLOTNER: Yes, um—could have been some—don't know for a fact. Greater New York Institute of Music could have been what it was called. But I know that it was on Avenue I and East 28th Street in Brooklyn.

LARSON: OK. And the two people who ran that school, you said it was a husband and wife?

BLOTNER: Martha and Bora Levitzky [name unverified]—Boris Levitzky.

LARSON: Uh-huh. And your flute teacher's name?

BLOTNER: I started with Sophie Schultz, who became Sophie Schultz-Sollberger during my course of study with her marrying Harvey Sollberger. And then I had a man. I think she probably left teaching at the school there. And he—somebody walks in, I don't remember his last name, as flute.

And cello, it was just class cello in schools. I never had private cello. Although the Alsop Quartet was perhaps in residence there, on the faculty at Brooklyn College, to come and teach, you know, some string instruments. So I did have some lessons with Ruth Alsop.

Which—I guess they were kind of one on one lessons. I mean, it wasn't the same as going to a private teacher or being in a conservatory. This was before Brooklyn College was a conservatory. And so it was basically getting a BA in music.

LARSON: Tell me about some of the piano music that you played, you know, prior to college that you have, you know, fond memories of.

BLOTNER: Oh, well, it was, I guess, kind of standard repertoire for piano students, I mean, some Mozart sonatas, Beethoven sonatas, Chopin mazurkas and waltzes and preludes. I didn't do any of the really more sophisticated, more complicated pieces. I did Haydn, the Haydn Piano Concerto. And then there was an assortment of Gershwin preludes, some Brahms. I can't remember exactly what at this point. It was a while ago. So you know, kind of—and some 20th-century pieces of that era. I think—I can't re—I can't really—

LARSON: Any of the [Bela] Bartok *Mikrokosmos*?

BLOTNER: Yes, thank you.

LARSON: Uh-huh.

BLOTNER: Yes, absolutely. Lots of those in book one, of course, and I think some in book two, maybe. I mean, I've got all the music. So I can go back and just look through the—because I always wound up buying everything.

LARSON: So as a child, how much were you aware of more kind of progressive, you know, contemporary and avant-garde music?

BLOTNER: As a—not very much until I got into college.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And as far as the flute music that you played, um—

BLOTNER: Also pretty standard repertoire, the Mozart flute concertos. Some—there was—there was a little—there was some French [Paul] Taffanel exercises and things like that.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Did you play any chamber music prior to college?

BLOTNER: Other than the piano ensembles, um—there wasn't—there wasn't really a chamber music program at that private music school. I don't think they had enough other instrumentalists to make that work. So that's why it was mainly the piano ensembles. And in high school, it was more band and orchestra than chamber ensembles, I think. So I might have done a little, but it wasn't as memorable as when I was in college, where they had a regular chamber music program.

LARSON: Tell me about your high school band and the director.

BLOTNER: Well, I remember this man, and I think he was the high school band, not the college band. So—but I don't remember his name. Um—well, the marching band was kind of fun because we had a very good football team. And Midwood High School was one of the best in New York then, so we were really proud to be from Midwood.

One year, the band got to play in the Columbus Day Parade down Fifth Avenue. Uh, and I remember it was about an 80-degree day, and we were all in our marching uniforms, which were all heavy wool to get us through the, you know, November season. But—but, you know, it was interesting and kind of fun.

The unfortunate thing is that any time anything exciting happened on the football field, we had to be playing. So we never really got to see the final touchdown, you know. We had to be ready with the first, uh, beat.

But the concert band part was really very nice. It was some original—I don't remember particularly what. But there were things that were originally written for band as well as, of course, arranged like Egmont. I remember the *Egmont Overture* [by Beethoven] distinctly and its band arrangement.

LARSON: Yeah?

BLOTNER: And—and so that was kind of fun, except that I was in one of these special programs in high school, so I had six majors. I was—there were two versions, a liberal arts version and a science version. And I was in the liberal arts version, so I got to take two languages, two foreign languages. The science people, you know, increased their sciences.

So there were four classes altogether, so 120 or whatever, 140 students. So if you were in band, you had to be in band during your lunch hour. So the conductor

had to arrange things so that he could do—rehearse sections so people would get to eat something during lunch.

LARSON: Wow, that's quite a challenge.

BLOTNER: It was a long schedule, but—you know, I mean, I was really kept quite busy in high school between, you know, my—the academics, and then the flute and the piano, which I was, you know, seriously practicing on both of them, and, um, and a little bit of cello, just to figure out what I was doing.

LARSON: Mm-hm. So it sounds like you were fairly serious about the music early on.

BLOTNER: Yeah. Mm-hm. Yeah.

2. Musical education and career decisions

LARSON: Was it clear to you as a young child that you wanted to pursue music, you know, seriously in college?

BLOTNER: It was pretty—well, I really—music was always there and a big part of everything. But I wasn't really sure what the options were. And performing was really not an option.

I mean, as my piano teacher once told my mother, I guess I was "talented but not gifted" I think was—were the words she used. And I—that was fine. I think that was pretty accurate, actually. And so that wasn't going to be a career.

And I didn't like teaching, whether it's private lessons, which I did a little bit of when I was in high school and college, or whether it would be, you know, more formal with a degree in music education. I just really didn't like teaching. So when I—my first year in college, I wasn't sure whether I wanted to major in music or in math, because I was also very good in math. And so I kind of, you know, took the easy way out and told the music teachers that I thought I might be a math major and told the math teachers that I might be a music major so they'd all kind of leave me alone.

LARSON: Uh-huh.

BLOTNER: And that lasted till sometime in my sophomore year, when I had to take the next—calculus and solid geometry. And that—I just couldn't deal with that. So that's when I became a music major.

LARSON: Uh-huh.

BLOTNER: But I still didn't clearly have the options of, okay, I'm majoring in music, but, you know, what am I really going to do. And I remember in my—I think it was my senior year, I had an interview with somebody from IBM, in fact. And—and, you know, I kind of said, you know, music major and IBM, and, you know, in a way, why am I here. And he said, well, you'd be surprised at how many music people wind up working with IBM. In fact, he said, I was a cellist.

So I was kind of thinking about that. And ultimately kind of copped out and decided to just stay and get a master's degree. And they offered me an assistantship, so I thought, oh good, I won't have to think about this, you know, and make a decision for a little while longer.

Coupled with that, a friend of mine in college had told me that she thought she was going to become a librarian. And—and I kind of said, well, what do you mean? I mean, I knew nothing about library school and the profession and any of that, although I was working, you know, as a student in the library. And she said, oh yes, you get a master's. And I guess she'd been talking to someone in main library.

So ultimately, she decided to go—to go into social work. And I then later decided to go to library school. But that was how I first found out that this is a viable career option. That, coupled with working in the Music Library at Brooklyn College and Walter Gerboth [Head of Music Library]—that's what, you know, set me in that direction.

LARSON: Mm-hm. But as you were finish—doing your bachelor's and then master's degree in music, you know, there's a—looking at the work that you've done, there's a real substantial, um, talent that you have for music, maybe from the—the scholarly standpoint. When did you—when were you kind of aware of that talent that you had and—

BLOTNER: Well, that's interesting, because I never particularly thought of it as a talent, in the sense that I was generally a good student. So I got good grades in everything. I liked some of my other subjects. But I guess there was more of a maybe emotional affinity for the music compared to math or Spanish or, you know, some of the other subjects.

I mean, the only thing that I never—I knew I was never going to be part of was—was basically athletics and sports and some of the sciences. At one point, I could have seen myself perhaps in pursuing chemistry, for example, which I did well at and really liked also. So I just—I wouldn't say it was a hobby to begin with. It was just kind of always there.

I think when I was getting my master's in music and doing a lot of work with Walter Gerboth, not simply in the Music Library, but he involved me in a lot of other projects he was doing. And just at that time, he became president of the Music Library Association. So he had all sorts of things going on and ways that he could involve me or maybe entice me into that profession.

We were friendly. We didn't live far from each other. So often, we would walk home together part of the way. And so I spent a lot of time talking to him and at his house. He had me doing some of the projects there.

So I knew his wife, and I knew his three kids. And so it became I guess a kind of typical graduate mentor relationship. And it just—that's when it really seemed to be a perfect fit. I think it wasn't till I was in, you know, somewheres in the middle of the two-year graduate program.

And also recognizing that another option could have been musicology. If it wasn't going to be teaching or performing, you know, what else? But I just didn't

enjoy that quite as much because I saw it as being very isolated because of all the research. And I didn't find—and this was the other factor. I just didn't find a particular area in music that I wanted to devote my life to. And that's what you need to do if you're a musicologist.

And I kind of liked—well, dabbling might not be the right word. But I kind of like—liked being involved in all of it, maybe not intensely, the way, you know, a musicologist might be. But nevertheless, involved in all of it. And so I think that also went into my interest in becoming a music librarian.

The one thing I thought I might have pursued maybe a doctorate in might have been music theory. And I guess I always gravitated towards the more analytical like the IBM job interview and those kinds of things. But ultimately, I just liked the broad spectrum of music librarianship.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Now Walter Gerboth, was he both on the musicology faculty as well as Head of the Music Library there at Brooklyn College?

BLOTNER: Well, yes. He was—um, and it wasn't—Brooklyn College had a small music department—smaller music department then. So they had music education and then the rest of the faculty. So I guess he was musicology. I'm not really sure exactly. Um, well, it would have to be that. Because it wasn't music ed[ucation], and it wasn't music theory/composition. So it must have been. But he—I don't know exactly what kind of appointment he had. He was Head of the library, and he had teaching responsibilities in undergraduate, and then he taught the graduate bibliography class.

LARSON: Mm-hm. So tell me about some of your other performing experience in college. You said you played in the orchestra as well as the band?

BLOTNER: Yes, yeah. I did both. And then my—where I was still taking piano lessons, they had the end of the year recitals, a whole weekend of recitals. So I played in those. At some point, a little earlier on, there were—I played at Town Hall in some student recital program. And I don't remember who sponsored it. But, you know, there were however many students. I don't know that it was only my teachers' studio.

I think—they had—she also participated in a national—it was—I'm trying to remember exactly what. Like a national piano teachers' association of some sort. And so they would send some evaluators every year. And we would have to, her students would each have to play for the evaluators. And you had to learn ten pieces across the whole spectrum of Baroque through 20th century. And then you would play whichever piece, movement, or whatever they asked you to play, all from memory.

She was very big on memory. Had to memorize the right hand separately, the left hand separately. You'd go in, and she'd tell you to please start at this section and, you know, on. And so we'd have to do that. And then we'd get some kind of certificate.

LARSON: Mm-hm. As far as the orchestral experience, were there any particular pieces or performances that stand out in your—in your mind, then?

BLOTNER: Not really, other than the *Egmont Overture* for some reason.

LARSON: Uh-huh. You mentioned earlier that you became aware of some of the more contemporary music in college.

BLOTNER: Mm-hm.

LARSON: Tell me what that was like for you when you kind of became aware of that.

BLOTNER: Well, it was—it was just an expansion, I thought, of—of music history, basically. And in graduate school, there was a—I can't remember if it was a seminar that we all had to take. No, this was a seminar in contemporary music, actually, which Paul Jacobs was teaching that semester, the pianist at the New York Philharmonic, and—an extremely temperamental person and, uh, brilliant.

And—I mean, kind of—he could—he could sit at the piano. It was a small class, maybe eight of us. He could sit at the piano and say—well, he said, here are the pieces that you should just know. I mean, the way you know, you know, standard repertoire. And he sat and played excerpts from [Karlheinz] Stockhausen and from, I mean, just anybody that happened to cross his mind at the moment—[Olivier] Messiaen, anybody. You know, and he said, well, don't you know this? Don't you know that? Don't you know—and he's sitting there playing all these things.

And so there were a couple of doctoral students there because they had just started a doctoral program at the main City University of New York Graduate Center. But I mean—so they might have coped a little better. But most of us were just totally stunned, not only about all the stuff we didn't know, but how he could just sit there so facilely playing through this, that, and the other. No music, you know, just, oh, well, you should know this, and you should know that.

And—so—um, so that course was a bit of a struggle for all of us. And we each had to do our, you know, pick a composer and do a presentation. And I picked [Edgard] Varese, actually. I'm not sure if it's—well, in part because I always liked percussion, and in part because he wrote relatively few pieces. And I think that combination, you know, was going to work for me. [laughter]

But I actually had just came back—and also, when I was in graduate school, somebody, another—a person, a composer had written a piece that was going to be a percussion piece, essentially, with lots of percussion, that was going to be performed. And so he now needed to round up all these people to play all these instruments. So I got drafted into this little chamber music group. I mean, there must've been eight of us or something. And I suddenly found myself playing timpani and, you know, all the other odd assortment of things. So—so that was kind of interesting and exciting. So, so there's—there's an aspect of me that really likes percussion.

LARSON: Wow. Did you ever do any other percussion playing after that?

BLOTNER: Oh no. That was—that was my only—they have, at Hartt, they have a—what do they—drum-- a drumming—they do drumming circles now. And I used to hear them outside my office in May. Because there was a beautiful big lawn, and it was just so tempting to do things. And I really, really liked that and thought I might join. And every time they—since I retired, every time they offered it, I was always someplace else for, you know, half of the month-long session or whatever it was going to be. But in the back of my mind, I think I might like to do that.

LARSON: So tell me about when you were in college becoming aware of so-called early music, you know, Renaissance and medieval music. Had you—did you know much of that before you went to college?

BLOTNER: No. I didn't know much of that at all. You know, the world kind of started with Baroque music when I was in high school. I guess it was a combination of—well, New York Pro Musica was just getting started in the '60s. And I was in high school in the '60s. So I knew some of it because it was right there in New York. In college, they had a collegium. And for part of your graduate degree, you had to be part of the collegium. Jean Hakes, the soprano, was in charge of that. And I think she might actually have been part of New York Pro Musica. I just don't remember at this point. You know, at some period. But she knew all of those people and so forth. But she was—she was really—most people didn't like studying with her, let's put it that way. And I'm not a great singer. And she could be very intimidating, and she seemed to enjoy intimidating people and trying to bring them to tears, because I know a couple of her vocal students. And so I didn't have a very good time a couple of times in that, which did not influence my opinion of early music by any means. But—

[phone rings]

BLOTNER: But—but it wasn't as enjoyable as my other performing experiences.

LARSON: (I thought I'd turned that off.) Okay. Your master's degree [thesis] was called "A Systematic Survey and Index of Techniques Used by German Composers of the Baroque Period in their Organ Settings of Chorale Melodies." Tell me what led you to this topic.

BLOTNER: I was interested in variation technique. And I also had to pick a piece and—and—which I used the Brahms *Haydn Variations* as the focus. And from that, that led me into studying variations. And one could look at the chorale preludes as examples of variations on chorale melodies. And so I tried to categorize these into types of variation style.

LARSON: Did It include things like chorale motets and chorale fantasias and all that?

BLOTNER: Mm-hm.

LARSON: Yeah, yeah.

BLOTNER: But I don't remember a whole lot about that at this point. I did not go back and look at it.

LARSON: And I know I asked you earlier. But for the record on the tape, I asked you if you had—because it's dealing with organ music, if you had played organ at all.

BLOTNER: I just fooled around with it a little bit with a couple of friends so that one would play one keyboard, one another keyboard, and one the pedals, but that was about as far as I ever got.

LARSON: Was there a particular piece or pieces from this repertoire that particularly interested you?

BLOTNER: No, actually not. It was the technique, rather than the individual pieces.

LARSON: And were you looking at a real comprehensive thing, or kind of select stuff to look at—

BLOTNER: No, I tried to be comprehensive.

LARSON: But has this been published at all, or—?

BLOTNER: No, no. And I'm not sure that it's worthy of being published either.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Your resume mentions a seminar in musicology with Gustave Reese at Harvard University.

BLOTNER: Mm-hm. That was fabulous. After I finished my bachelor's degree, I wound up coming here to Cambridge for this summer program. A friend of mine, another one from that piano studio, had a friend who was at Radcliffe [College]. And this Radcliffe friend said to our mutual friend, do you know, I can rent this house right near Harvard Square on Trowbridge Street. And it would be—if we have four of us, it would be $40 a person per month. And so I decided this would be a good thing. I joined in with them.

And then, I don't know how—I guess I looked to take a course and discovered this course. I mean, apparently it's a very famous course because he'd been doing it every summer for years. But I didn't realize that until I got here, and I signed up for the course, and—and I was so naive, it was really funny. Because this was a course for not only graduate students, but a lot of the people in the class were already in doctoral programs. And—and you know, Brooklyn College had a very good music program, but, I mean, nevertheless, I still just had a bachelor's degree.

And so the beginning was a struggle for me, aside from it being Gustave Reese, and you know. Not that he was an intimidating person. But he was older. He was, you know, certainly world famous for his research and spoke in kind of an old school, very proper style, and everybody was Miss so and so and Mr. so and so. And, um, so—but he was, I mean, kind, but, you know, he had his protocols and rules. So I was really very scared about the whole thing at first.

Basically, he presented the class— This is what he would do every summer: he'd present the class with a manuscript, a Renaissance manuscript, that did not have a concordance yet. And the class was to do a concordance of it.

And this entailed spending many, many, many hours at the Isham microfilm library and also, you know, other reference materials in the Harvard Music Library, looking for the concordance was—the manuscript was divided up so that each of the class got six or eight or whatever of the pieces that were in it. And we had to go find these pieces in other concordances, manuscripts, whatever. And as soon as any one person found their piece in a particular title, everybody had to look at the title. So we all had to look at everything that everybody looked at. So that's what made it so—so time-consuming and tedious. But it was, you know, invigorating when you found something, and exciting, and, you know, there you were in, you know, world famous Harvard's Isham Memorial Library, looking at all their things.

But one of the things that made it particularly exciting for me was one of my pieces was anonymous, and I found the composer. So that kind of ratcheted up my

value to the class, or did to Professor Reese, anyway. [laughter] But just—I mean, by chance and by being thorough. I mean, I had to look at the same sources everybody else had to look at. And I compared it, note for note. Here was the same music that I had, but here's a composer. It was by [Loyset] Compère [ca. 1445–1518]. And there was no doubt it was the same piece. And so now we had a composer for this.

LARSON: So what was the—the larger manuscript? It was a collection of pieces, but what was the title of it, or—

BLOTNER: Oh, I don't—I don't know. I'd have to—if it didn't say in there, I'd have to go back and—and look it up. Because I think I have a copy of the concordance that we produced. It—I mean, a typical—you know, the way they name all those 15th—or 16th century, it was a 16th-century manuscript, I think. The way they name them all by the original library and, you know, that kind of thing, and I don't really remember the particulars right now.

LARSON: Uh-huh. Was it lots of different kinds of—was it, like, keyboard music or vocal music or—

BLOTNER: I think it was—well, it could have been both. And there were about maybe eight or ten composers spread throughout. Just an odd compilation. There didn't seem to be a theme or anything like that.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Although you said earlier that the music theory side of the scholarly endeavor to music was of interest, you certainly have a musicological kind of insight. I've read some of your reviews of—and—have you kind of kept in touch with some of the musicology community besides the faculty you were working with? But have there been—and I know you've been, you know, a member of the Musicological Society for a long time and—but have you kind of kept up some of those—those ties with people?

BLOTNER: Um—not with very many of them. It would depend on, you know, who was living in the area I was living in or working at the same institution. The only time that I really got more closely involved was when I was editing Notes[: Quarterly Journal of Music Library Association]. Then I went—for the four years I edited *Notes*, I went to all the national AMS [American Musicological Association] meetings, because I was looking for papers, and I was looking to—I wanted to stay more closely in touch with current research. And so—so then I was following things more closely. But other than that, I didn't really keep up with it much.

LARSON: Prior to college, had you used the music library at the New York Public Library? And had you been kind of aware of the concept of a music library?

BLOTNER: Yes. I was up there a lot. I don't remember if I was up there a lot in high school because I wasn't really taking music classes other than the band and orchestra or chamber music. But in college, I was up there all the time. Not that Brooklyn College didn't have a good library, but there were so many more things up at the Lincoln Center Library. And it had just opened in its Lincoln Center environment. So I—I almost never was at the 42nd Street library. It was always up at Lincoln Center.

LARSON: What was it like the first time you walked into a music library? Do you remember—have a first memory of kind of what that was like and—

BLOTNER: Not a really strong one. The first one was likely Brooklyn College as a, you know, music student there. And that was a pretty small library at that time. It seemed kind of cramped. But on the other hand, it seemed to have everything I needed, certainly, as a freshman and sophomore. I really loved the fact that there was this environment where everybody was studying music.

LARSON: Mm-hm. I know earlier, you were talking about some of the things that led you to pursue music librarianship. Is there anything else you want to talk about what kind of led you in that direction?

BLOTNER: Well, I know this is going to sound kind of typical, but I loved reading. And so therefore, as a child, I used our local public library. I would walk over with my brother or sometimes my mother. My mother liked reading also. And be borrowing books, and I was always reading. Just basically fiction, I always liked to read fiction. So not that that's directly related, but I knew there were libraries and, you know, that people used them, that they were nice places that you could borrow from—you know, the basic stuff, I knew from a relatively early—elementary school, probably, maybe junior high school.

LARSON: Were there any experiences, not just music libraries but libraries in general, that as a child kind of opened up new ideas for you or just got you—introduced you to either literature or something that you wouldn't have known otherwise that made you think that libraries were special?

BLOTNER: Well, I also went, in addition to the local library a few blocks away, I also went to the main Brooklyn Public Library at Grand Army Plaza. That was a whole lot bigger, so bigger collection and everything. And it was a really beautiful library. And I—I just, I felt—I liked it there. I felt comfortable, and they had a bigger collection, more choices, more of the classical literature and so forth. So those library experiences were very positive.

I don't remember much about libraries in any of my schools till college. So I don't know if they had them or not, or—I just don't remember there being a library, at least not one that I ever went into. But that could be because I was in band during my lunch hour, instead of in the library, I don't know. [laughter]

LARSON: And you went to the University of Michigan for your master's of library science degree. Why did you go to Michigan?

BLOTNER: Oh. Because Walter Gerboth told me that if I were going to library school, there were four schools that he would recommend because they had either a strong music program or they actually had a course in music librarianship or music bibliography. And there was somebody, therefore, in the library school who was a music librarian or had a connection. And so that was the University of Michigan, Columbia, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and UC-Berkeley.

And I applied to all four schools. I think I got into all four. North Carolina offered me money. But I opted for Michigan for two practical reasons, in my mind.

I would only—they would accept six credits transferred from my music master's degree, which some of the others would. But they also only needed thirty

credits. North Carolina wanted thirty-six credits. And I wouldn't have to write any kind of thesis or final paper. So I figured I could just go for the two semesters.

And they had Bill [William B.] Weichlein was teaching both in the music school and in the library school. And he was then Executive Secretary of MLA [Music Library Association] and, you know, one of the big important people. So I would get to meet yet somebody else and study with somebody that, you know, had a good reputation.

And they had two options—two possibilities. There was a music bibliography class, which both the library school and the music school recognized as a—for degree credits. And they also had a seminar in music librarianship.

So now I only needed thirty credits. I could transfer six. And of the remaining twenty-four, six of them would be music-related. So—and there was, you know, Bill Weichlein on top of it, and University of Michigan is a great school. You know, good reputation, and it was relatively near to where I lived because I had pretty much lived home through college. And then in graduate school, I lived in apartments with roommates. So the whole mix seemed to be, you know, the right thing.

LARSON: So up to that point in your library experience, had you used any computer resources, or was that still—?

BLOTNER: Oh no, there weren't—that was too early. That was too early, yeah.

LARSON: I just wondered if there were any—anything at all. I mean, was there a discussion of—of either future possible computer technology in the library school? Was that even discussed?

BLOTNER: Yes, yeah. There was a course—in one of the courses I took, we were working actually with punch cards. That's where it was at that point. Because this was the early '70s, so things were getting started. But I don't remember the details of it. I just remember having a stack of punch cards that we had to go to this, one of those huge, big free-standing mainframe kind of computers. And so I think the principle of how one organized things and how computers functioned probably came out. But as far as more practical applications, I think they were still a little bit away from that.

3. First professional library experiences

LARSON: Yeah, right. You spent a year at the Library of Congress in the music cataloging section from 1971 to '72. Tell me about that.

BLOTNER: Well, so I'd graduated library school, and now I needed a job. And most of the jobs being offered at that time were for music cataloging, which wasn't what I really wanted to do. I had done assistance, assisting catalogers, twice before that. One when I was at Brooklyn College because there was a music cataloger who—who worked in the main library, but she was music cataloger, not just general plus music. And so I was kind of like a—an aide or a—when I had, I had a, uh, assistantship for the two years I was in grad school.

And fortunately, I didn't have to do much teaching. I could assist in the library. So I used to help her with catalog corrections and other kinds of things.

And then that summer that I was at Harvard, I got a job in the Fogg Art Library, also assisting the head of technical services. And those were the years when there were huge changes, and all the subject headings had to be changed and all of this stuff. So I got very familiar with electric erasers and those thin strips of white tape that you could put over and then type. I was a good typist, so—so that was my whole experience with cataloging.

And I wasn't really crazy about it, but I thought, well, having a job is better than not having a job. And if I'm going to have to be cataloging, cataloging at the Library of Congress would be better than cataloging someplace else. And so that's why I went there.

And I had been introduced to Virginia Cunningham, who was the head of the music cataloging section then for many years and very prominent, at one of the MLA meetings I went to when I was a student. It was in Washington. And of course, Walter Gerboth knew everybody and just introduced me. And so, it was, well, if Walter thinks you're fine, then you're fine, and so I got hired there.

And also Katy Scrobela, who—well, she was Katherine Creelman then and then got married and became Scrobela. And she was pretty active in the music cataloging end of things. Because AACR2 [Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd edition] was about to happen, and so they were doing all of these meetings about that. And well, it was impressive. I loved, you know, walking into the Library of Congress when I went to work every day.

The other people in the music cataloging section had, I don't know, maybe ten, twelve people working there. And unlike—I know it's been reorganized—but at that time, cataloging was divided into descriptive and subject. In descriptive, you had all the people with library degrees. And in subject, you had all the people with master's degrees.

And the only exception was the music section, which did descriptive and subject. Because for both, you would really need a music background. So that part was really nice. I was now again in a kind of music librarianship environment.

And I think that everybody should catalog for their first job because you really, really learn how a catalog functions. And it comes—it has come in extremely handy throughout my entire career. I can understand how catalogers talk and how they think about things.

And at the Library of Congress in particular, it was so different from a local library, as I think I was mentioning the other day to you on the phone, because they really had to follow the rules. They weren't cataloging for their particular user community. They were cataloging for posterity, for the world, for, you know, however you wanted to describe it. So they thought about things differently and never made an exception.

There were no local exceptions, the way most other libraries make. And I found the whole thing frustrating and somewhat tedious because it was all so

repetitive, and you really had to stay within the box. But nevertheless, it was a really wonderful experience.

And one of the times that it—it paid off was when I was here at MIT. They had divisional directors that met every two weeks. And they also had branch library heads that met every two weeks. And we'd get the minutes from the divisional directors. And in one of these minutes, set of minutes, it said that the catalog department would no longer maintain its syndetic structure. I think there were still card catalogs then. And we're not going to maintain the syndetic structure.

David Ferriero was then the Head of Humanities library and my boss. And so I went over to him, and I said, David, what's going on here? Do you know what—how can they do this? Well, do you know there wasn't anybody on Library Council that knew what a syndetic structure was? That was—I said, they're going to get rid of the entire cross reference system. How are you going to do reference without cross references?

By that point, see, the catalog department had dumped all the cards. It was, they had a backlog and couldn't keep up with typing the cards. And that's why they wanted it, because they didn't do any public service, and they had shoe boxes full of cards that needed to be—have cross references typed. They dumped all the cross references. Well, ultimately, with online, it didn't matter. But at that time, it certainly was going to be impossible.

And none of them realized what they were saying. Nobody asked, what is a syndetic—they probably—I know. I've been at meetings. I'm, you know, embarrassed to let people know I don't know some particular thing. But nobody asked nobody anything. And that was all so important.

So—so for—that, among other reasons. But that's one of the examples that sticks in my mind about why it's important to understand, from a public service perspective, what catalogers do and how it's going to affect what users need to find.

LARSON: I'm sure you've experienced this, though I'm asking maybe from a slightly heretical point of view. Experienced music faculty come in, and oftentimes they can't find things because of some of the arcane subject headings and stuff like that. What's your experience with that and maybe your opinion about some of the—? A cataloger's kind of point of view [is] different from a musicologist's or a performer's kind of point of view; what's your experience with that and your opinion about that?

BLOTNER: Well, first of all, when someone like that or almost anybody comes in, I mean one of—a regular user. I always kind of look at regular users differently from the occasional user. When a regular user comes in and, you know, can't find something, first I decide—find out from them, do you need it this instant?

You know, how much time do you have? Are you in the middle of a, you know, rehearsal, and you—or a class, and you just need an example of this? In which case, I'll go and find it for them and hand it to them. Or are they doing research, and this is part of the process? In which case, I try to make it a lesson, not just, here, I'll find it for you.

I try to also, depending on the specifics, explain how this question that they have fits into the context of how things are cataloged. Because, yes, we can try to make local changes or add a cross reference for somebody. But this is going—this principle is going to affect them when they're looking for other things that fall into a similar pattern. And so it would be good for them to understand how this works because cataloging is a national effort, and we can't make unilateral changes here for everybody that doesn't find it on the specific term that they're looking for.

Now that was in—most of that was in the card catalog days. But even so, you know, at Hartt, more recently, it's the same principle. If someone's got an immediate need, you know, then just take care of it right now. And if they're a regular user, then you need them to understand more and try to bridge the gap. Similarly, in talking to the catalogers, which is why it's so important to have a music cataloger, you need—they need—they will understand more quickly why a user would come in and not be able to find something and think about how they could do a workaround within the context of their cataloging rules that would help somebody.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Also, on the phone, you were talking about indexing versus cataloging and how that meets different needs of—of users. Do you want to talk a little bit about that.?

BLOTNER: Oh, sure. Well, so I've already talked a bit about cataloging and the, you know, kind of pros and cons for that. Therefore, it was indexing that I just really took a liking to, and fairly early on. I was actually an undergraduate when I first learned about indexing. Well, of course everyone sees indexes in the back of the book. But when I first learned about some of the principles behind them.

And that, again, was through Walter Gerboth, because he indexed. And when I was an undergraduate, maybe a junior, he was working on the Index to Festschrift. I remember one summer when it was fairly quiet during—I was probably working probably evenings, and it was fairly quiet. And so I would come in, and he would have a stack of Festschrift sitting on the desk near the typewriter. And what he wanted me to do was type up index cards for every article, essay in each of the Festschrift.

And so it would have the author and the title, some, you know, abbreviated version of Festschrift, and the page numbers and so forth. Because that's how one compiled indexes then, you know, the three-by-five index cards. And so from that, at first I had no clue what this was about. And of course, it was in all sorts of foreign languages, which, you know, music people come to cope with foreign languages, so that part was okay. But it was kind of tedious, and I didn't underst—I didn't know what he was doing, and then I learned more as the project progressed.

And—and so he would tell me about—because he didn't like cataloging a whole lot either, so we had something in common there. And he would tell me how the basic principles, as I was describing some of them, and how you could tailor the index. I mean, this is the answer to the question you asked me before. You could tailor the index to who you thought the user group would be and how they would look for things and, whether you wanted to use their terms for your main entries or at least

have a cross reference. I mean, that allowed you the total flexibility that cataloging doesn't.

And so that's what always fascinated me because each time you do at least a back of the book index, you're creating your own cataloging system, as it were, the way you want it to be. And I, you know, have always kind of had an independent mind, you know. Like, why do I have to do what they tell me to do? I think this would be better. So, that was like—that was a good match for me.

LARSON: Mm-hm. And you've indexed some pretty substantial books, you know, David Epstein's *Beyond Orpheus*, and there was that Leo Treitler book, and—

BLOTNER: Mm-hm.

LARSON: So—so it looks like you are well respected in the indexing community.

BLOTNER: There was only one book I indexed, and I don't remember—I could look at the list. I don't remember a whole lot about it. But I over-indexed it. Because it wasn't a scholarly book. It was more of a—you know, the middle range for general readers.

And, um—but my attitude always is, suppose somebody as a scholar—it's perfect for scholarship, my attitude. Because suppose someone wants to find this little piece of information, I remember from when I was a student and, you know, from what I see faculty doing. How are you going to find this little piece of information? It could be vital to somebody.

And especially in the days when you couldn't just do a, you know, a find everything with this word in it, you know, in a chapter. You needed to do something in the index. And this was over-indexing because it was a wrong—the wrong audience. And so I kind of stopped focusing on, or trying to work for that kind of audience.

Like the one time I did a book that wasn't a music book. It was on German—it was for someone here, a faculty member at MIT, actually, in social sciences. And she was publishing her doctoral dissertation, which was on German health insurance. And she played flute. So she'd come into the library, and I'd see her. We became friendly.

And so she asked if I wanted—I think I had just won the award for David's book. So she saw it in the paper here on campus and said, oh, do you want to index, you know, my dissertation—the book for my dissertation? And so I thought, well, yeah, I could try something like that.

Oh, I hated it. I just hated every minute. I had no interest in German health insurance. I didn't have enough—I think I did okay, an okay job. But I didn't really have enough knowledge for me to feel I was doing the best index for the people who'd be using it.

And I just—I've turned down a couple of other opportunities that were not music. I said, I know about music. I'll index music. But, you know, it's not like I have to make my living by indexing, so.

LARSON: Right. And as an indexer, you really have to understand the book inside and out in a way that a cataloger may not need to understand a particular—

BLOTNER: Mm-hm, right. Because essentially, I mean, if—by analogy, what the cataloger is doing is perhaps providing six entries in their sort of index, as it were, their catalog subject name headings. Whereas an indexer is providing hundreds, if not thousands, of access points.

4. Music Librarian at MIT, 1972–1984

LARSON: Mm-hm, right, right. So you became the Music Librarian here at MIT in 1972. What led you to take this job?

BLOTNER: Well I really did not want to continue cataloging. And I really—I loved being in Boston that summer I had been here when I took the course with Dr. Reese. And Washington had just built the Kennedy Performing Arts Center. And it really—I just didn't feel an affinity for being in Washington the way I had for being in Boston. So when that opened up, and it was public services, it was in Boston, it just seemed like the right opportunity at the right time.

And I know—MIT, of course, was famous. But they had a music program. I met Klaus Liepmann [first Professor of Music at MIT], got interviewed, heard what they were interested in, saw the library. So, all the pieces kind of fell into place for me at that point.

LARSON: Mm-hm. How much were you aware of the music program before you came for the interview at MIT?

BLOTNER: Oh, I wasn't. I wasn't particularly knowledgeable about it.

LARSON: Uh-huh. Did you, um—but I guess from the job description, that that's what interested you in the job, as opposed to knowing more about the library and the music program.

BLOTNER: Well, it interested me because I would be in a music li—running a music library that actually was similar to Brooklyn College's music library, so I felt comfortable. It wasn't a huge university library. It wasn't a conservatory library. You know, it—I could—it was comparable to something I understood. And when I saw it, and I saw what was on the shelves and so forth, um—you know, I just—I liked it. The fact that it was MIT, at that point was interesting, but I might have gone almost any place to be in a library like the one here.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So there were many challenges that you faced when you arrived. Can you tell me about some of them? For example, the space concern?

BLOTNER: Well, when I arrived, there wasn't a huge—I didn't think there was a huge space concern yet, not in the beginning. But there were—um—there were two concerns of different sorts. One concern was that this—well, this functioned—actually, they're related concerns. One, this functioned more like a music lounge than a music library. There were big, comfortable, cushy seats and small couches. I don't know if you ever got to see them where it was—

LARSON: Yes.

BLOTNER: Yes, okay. Well, they were set up all around the library. And I think there were still those two kind of standard library tables. But they—you couldn't really find them or see them because most of what was out in the open were—was that kind of lounge furniture.

And secondly, they played music every day over speakers in the library at 12 o'clock so people could come in. You know, I don't know that they actually ate in here. But it was, you know, a listening lounge.

And so I stopped that right away. If this is a library, you're not going to—you know, we're not—if we were doing concerts, that's one thing. And we did, later. But this is not—that, that's not what this is. It's a library, and you have programs and people who need to study and so forth. And to do this every single day at noon is not the way to encourage that.

And the other thing, the card catalog consisted—Christie [Christina Moore, library assistant] will remember this well—consisted of, I think, eleven different alphabetic files. So that the names—first of all, the three different formats were in separate sections. Secondly, each of those sections had a separate name, title, subject, performers. There were eleven separate alphabets to this card catalog. Made it impossible to—I mean, it took you a few minutes to figure out which drawer to look in.

And then if you were looking, you'd have to look here for the score. Then you'd have to go there and look for a recording. And recording cataloging was complicated anyway to try to find things. Christie and I spent that—my first Christmas here interfiling the whole cat—all of it into one massive catalog. So—so those—those—you know, all these years, those are the two things that, you know, stand out in my mind.

Now going along with the music lounge perception was that some of the faculty, I don't know how many, but I know one in particular, kind of viewed this as—well, yes, support for the music program, but support to the extent that when someone would come to teach in the seminar room—that was there, I guess—they would come in and give a short list of what they wanted to teach with to my predecessor and expect her to go fetch it all off the shelves for them. And the first time a faculty member approached me with that, I said, "Oh yes, I'm sure we have all these things." I mean, it was standard Romantic repertoire. So I said, "Oh yes, we have these things." And he told me how my predecessor used to get all this off the shelf for him.

I said, "Well, I don't think that's really what the librarian should be doing here. Surely you have a student assistant who could do this for you." Well, he didn't really. But I said, "Well, I'll, you know, help you this time, but, you know, because your class is coming up and it's your time frame. But that's not what we really have time to do here."

So there was this other perception that that's what the librar—this was the librarian. He wasn't asking if there was a student, or I'm running late, could somebody help me out with this? This was the regular perception of, that's what the librarian did here: play records, you know, at 12 o'clock and fetch things off the shelf for the

faculty. So even though this was my second year as a professional music librarian, I decided that wasn't what I was going to be doing. So that worked out okay. He was very gracious about it.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Also, you oversaw the adoption of Library of Congress cataloging rules because there was a lot of local stuff, and you were—there was a committee that was formed to deal with that. So tell me what that was like.

BLOTNER: Well, there was also—a lot of the books were cataloged—were classified in Dewey [Decimal System]. And that was true all over the MIT library system, as many of the libraries in the country. But our collection was small enough here so that we actually were able to reclassify them. And so that was—we weeded and eventually, you know, got them reclassed, I think.

But it always was—we were lucky in that the person who cataloged music actually was a music cataloger. Well, she actually knew music. She hadn't been hired as a music cataloger.

LARSON: Right. And that was Ligija Nei[bergs]—

BLOTNER: Ligija Neibergs, yeah. And I think she kind of welcomed my pushing for, you know, more serious music cataloging. And so really jumped into it and would come down and talk to me about certain things. And when we had to do—change all the Tchaikovsky headings—[coughs]—excuse me—and the Vivaldi numbering system and so forth. She would always confer, and it was a really good relationship, and really helpful to have someone who understood. In addition to which, at some point along the line, Sarah Gramenz—it's, I think, Sarah Mitchell now, if she's still here.

LARSON: Yeah.

BLOTNER: She became head of—I can't remember which division and whether it was ultimately all of cataloging. But Sarah has a bachelor's in music also, and her husband—first husband—was a music librarian. So we formed a small committee of Ligija, Sarah, me, and also Howard Kennett?

LARSON: Howard Kennett?

BLOTNER: Kennett. Also another master's in music. So the four of us shepherded through all these changes because you had basically three people from the cataloging division, and all of us understood what music would need and why you couldn't just plug in all the standard decisions that might have been made for the rest of cataloging here. So that was just a godsend. We had our students here doing a lot of the work, you know, the circulation students in the down times.

And that was fine. Of course, you couldn't expect them to do all of it upstairs. It was just such a big job.

LARSON: Right, right. There was also the decision to continue using the MIT local call number class for scores and recordings.

BLOTNER: Mm-hm. Yeah, I think that happened for two reasons. I think it would have been impossible to change them all, just from a, you know, workload basis. And the faculty and students loved it because the browsing—the scores being a browsing collection.

And having a split collection, I never liked a split collection. It just makes people have to go to two places. So at least keeping this allowed it to stay in one consecutive sequence.

LARSON: Right. Having worked at, I'm sure, at Hartt, they—things are on the shelf by subject as opposed to composer. What's your kind of experience in how you notice the differences in how people use the collection, then, with that?

BLOTNER: I think—I think it's basically what you get used to. And—I'm just trying to think if—I mean certainly, MIT students could have learned the LC [Library of Congress] classification system. I mean—you know, and then they'd find things by medium of performance instead. And they certainly could have done that. And I'm sure the Hartt students could find things by composer.

But the problem is whichever way you use it, you really do need a catalog because you're not going to find everything for your instrument, which is what they're usually looking for. So I honestly don't think it makes a big difference. I mean, as long as there's a system, and as long as you follow it, and the users know it, and the catalog backs it up in case you need another way of finding what you need.

LARSON: Right. So the year 1974–75 is when the MIT Library started using the OCLC database for cataloging. Now what was that like here at the music library, as far as your work with that implementation?

BLOTNER: I don't have really strong memories of that. I do remember when we got our first computer. And it was in one of the separate rooms, along where the listening rooms are. And so if you needed to do something with the computer, you went there and did it. You know, it's such a far cry from how things are now, you know?

But as far as the cataloging, I think that it really required you to more strictly follow LC cataloging. Because if you're doing your ordering cards, or you're having to type in subject headings and so forth, well, if you want to make some little changes, you can do it, and it's not going to affect anybody. But if everything is in a database, and you're getting your cards printed from the database, you have less flexibility in the local changes you want to make.

So, you know, you worked around and tried to do what you could do. But on the other hand, you know, that's—I mean, looking back now, it couldn't have been any other way, really. That's what was happening nationally. And there were certainly positive things about it.

LARSON: Right. So you mentioned earlier that when you first arrived, the music library was more of a listening lounge. And you saw a significant change where it became a serious academic music library. Can you tell me more about that and just what that process was like and the vision you had for it?

BLOTNER: Well, it was on—well, there were a few different areas. It changed kind of externally, because you didn't just come in and expect to hear music. You came in and—not that there wasn't socializing. I mean, in a music library, users all know each other, differently, I think, than in other subject areas. But the expectations were different.

We tried to do serious collection building. Now the collection was good. It was a good basic collection, which I think was largely due to Klaus Liepmann's efforts. A lot of the collected editions and so forth, I mean, I was really surprised at the kinds of things that were here given that there wasn't a music major and that it was basically undergraduate courses. So he'd done a really fine job of building the collection.

And so then I tried to build on that. We were able to get—it was the Council for the Arts at MIT had gotten started around then. So I could submit little grant proposals for $1,500, get the music theater collection at one point or fill in a gap someplace else. We were getting decent-sized budgets because I kept providing statistics on things, on use and so forth. And music libraries always show high use statistics, largely because of listening, I think. But even, you know, score reading.

Now when Marcus Thompson started the chamber music program here, one of the things he did was have that IAP [Independent Activities Period] event, I don't know if they're still doing it here. But he would have—I forget what it was called, but it was a chamber music day. And he—students would sign up with him, and he'd form small groups. And every hour, the groups would change. And there would be performances in various classrooms or in the seminar room and even in the Music Library itself.

And so student—there'd be just dozens of students pulling chamber music off the shelf. They could do readings rather than a real performance. And—and then there was a, like, dinner munchies break. We had food out, vegetables and dip and stuff like that for them to eat. And then it always concluded at maybe 9 o'clock at night with playing one of the *Brandenburgs* [Concertos by Bach] right here in the library.

So there were some things like that—these chamber music efforts—that brought more students in and therefore needed more kinds of music for different performing combinations. And so I was working with the faculty, with all of the fac—composers on the contemporary music, with Marcus on chamber music, and—you know, sort of to supplement what I knew or could read in reviews that we obviously needed. And trying to build the collection on all the fronts that were important here.

Now around that time, 1974, I think, was when the Boston Area Music Libraries got started. And Mary Lou Little was the Music Librarian at Harvard then. And this was really kind of an odd twist because she's the one that started the group.

She—first of all, when anybody new arrived in a music library here, she would call them up and invite them over to see Harvard. She'd take them to lunch and, you know—very different from what you might expect an institution like that to be doing. But she was very welcoming to everybody.

And so she then wanted—she got the group together from all the libraries. And she wanted to have a collection sharing, cooperative collection development, actually. This was just ahead of its time. Nobody was doing that then. Everybody thought they had to buy everything for their own faculty and students.

But her budget was becoming tight. And she thought if we could share among us, we wouldn't all have to be buying the same things. And it was a really interesting project.

We used the LC class system. And each of us went through it, checking off which areas we had strong or were intending to have strong collections and which weak, and so forth. And of course, you know, basic repertoire, everybody had to buy basic repertoire. But there were a lot of other areas that we didn't.

MIT became one of the stronger collections for chamber music because of the program here. Wellesley [College] was a strong program in early music because of programs there. And BU [Boston University] and Harvard were picking up the more scholarly things. And so it really was very helpful to—in helping decisions—in purchasing decisions—and also know where you could go for what, and also know that we had a cooperative group, and we were going to do whatever we could to make sure that we were helping a fellow institution.

And we worked out all these wonderful little ways of transporting things. Because very often, someone needed something tonight or tomorrow. And going through regular interlibrary loan—even then, I think, they had some sort of shuttle, but it still wasn't going to do it. So you'd call up the librarian, and—and it would turn out that your student here is dating someone at their institution, and so I could give it to her, and she'd give it to him and you'd have it, you know, dinnertime.

And so we had all of these very, very odd arrangements for transporting music. But, you know, as long as it was with people whom you knew well and you knew it would get where it needed to be in time, you know, it was fine. We signed it out and everything the way we needed to do. But we just had a different transportation system for this. And someone would say well, I'm going to a concert with her tonight, so I can give it to her, and she'll give it to you first thing in the morning. All kinds of little arrangements like that.

But it was very adventuresome for that time in the history of libraries, I think. It was before there were these cooperative efforts that, you know, are so abundant now. And so—so that helped the [whole?] collection development project, because then you could focus your money on the areas that were more important to the program at your institution. So I think that was a big change, in part because my predecessor wasn't really focused on collection development and in part because with the outreach throughout the greater Boston area, we were able to do things like that and make it kind of one big music community. I mean, it already was, but kind of supplement and strengthen the music community that exists in Boston.

LARSON: So I guess part and parcel of that—of course, it would have a more serious academic focus because you're being part of that larger music library community.

BLOTNER: Mm-hm, yeah. Yes, and the faculty and the students all appreciated it because they realized what great service they were getting when they needed something.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

BLOTNER: And then we were lucky to be able to do it because there were so many good [inaudible] music libraries in the area, and because the transportation was so much

easier. I mean, if you think of trying to get something from Manhattan out to, you know, Brooklyn College, well it's going to take a minimum of an hour if you catch—if you're lucky with the trains, and if you know the right people. And it was too big a city, I think, to have something quite so similar.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Yeah, the fact that there's not a lot of music majors here, but yet the, the Music Library is a real serious intellectual collection—how—what was your understanding as far as how the library supported the music program here, but also looking beyond just supporting the music program? How did you—what was your kind of vision for the library?

BLOTNER: Well, my vision for a library was—was kind of twofold. One, regardless of what was being taught, you needed to have basic materials across almost every spectrum. If you do a collection development policy with A being comprehensive and E being almost nothing, everything had to have something like at the E-plus/D-minus level for almost every topic because it's a university, and you've got all sorts of students. And this was before a lot of the ethnomusicology and world music emphasis that's come along in the last, I don't know, fifteen years or twenty years.

So—so that was one thing. You really needed to cover a lot of area. But you also needed to support what was being taught here. I mean, you needed to be much stronger.

And so whatever—whatever library it is, if you've got a certain set of music subjects that are taught heavily and others that there's barely nothing—I mean, you know, music education comes to mind. There are schools that have no music education or early music or not a lot of contemporary music because there aren't a lot of composers on the fac—I mean, that's not true here, and that's not true at Hartt, so I never had that. But there are lots of places where there isn't a very strong contemporary music program. So you really—I mean, you're kind of duty-bound to support what the courses are and the majors are or the faculty.

But you've got to balance it out because if you have only faculty selecting, then you can have a very limited collection also. That's why I say there has to be also a broad spectrum to make sure everything is covered because students aren't interested only in what the faculty are teaching. And then you get a change in faculty, and then what do you do? You've got nothing in this other faculty area of interest, and you can't even buy some of them. They're out of print at that point.

LARSON: Right. So there's a report [ca. 1974] that was written up about selection policy or collection development, and you specifically mention jazz. I know that when I was in college, it was still somewhat unusual for music libraries to collect jazz.

BLOTNER: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

LARSON: So tell me about that.

BLOTNER: Well, there was—there were people playing jazz. I mean, this wasn't as strong as, like, Berklee, for example. But—but they—Mark Harvey [jazz trumpeter, composer, senior lecturer in music at MIT], right? Is—

LARSON: Mark Harvey.

BLOTNER: Yes. I mean, there was—if there's a jazz band, then you need to do some kind of support. And at that point, there wasn't as much printed music available as there is now. So books and recordings would be the minimal—and, you know, some periodicals—the minimal literature to support, to be able to support—to get to be able to support the programs.

LARSON: Was—even some schools at that time that had a jazz program, it was still considered for some music libraries to collect jazz, it was seen as somewhat kind of odd. Did you—did you have to go through anything with the faculty on that? Or was it just something that you just saw that needed to be done, and it was—it was—

BLOTNER: Well, I was trying to follow what music was happening here and needed to be supported. That was always an immediate goal for how the budget dollars should be used. But for areas that were not—were not taught here, then it could be scaled back, but I always thought there needed to be some things.

And the faculty—faculty, I found, generally don't complain a lot if they get what's important to them. They don't really care if you're also giving somebody else what's important to them. So I never had trouble, either here or at Hartt, with faculty.

But then, I've also always talked to faculty about what's needed for their work and what their opinion is. They're much…they're tied much more closely to music and to what the students need. Maybe not to everything that's available, but lots of times, I would mark up or send them publishers' catalogs, saying, you know, you think we need anything from here? So I always would get faculty feedback. So I think that that was greatly appreciated, and it made them feel that they were—this was their library. They were a part of the whole process.

And it helped me understand what their programs were about, you know, and what the differences were. They would come and tell me, well, I think we should have this because of this reason. And even though that seems similar, it's a little more this. I know the guy who wrote this, for example, they could say. And you know, I don't think we need to do that.

And, you know, collection development, by and large, is a judgment call. And I always felt that faculty judgment was really critical to that if you're in a university, academic environment. Not—public library would be a whole different matter, and I really don't know a whole lot about how they make their decisions. But in academia, it's based on what you need to teach.

LARSON: Right. You must have had lots of conversations with music faculty about the role of the music program here at MIT and the humanities and all that. What was your understanding at the time of, kind of, the underlying philosophy of that and how the Music Library supported that—the mission of the arts and humanities here at MIT?

BLOTNER: Well, I felt that I was really lucky coming here when I did, because that's when MIT was trying to increase the arts at MIT. So to some extent, it was easy because MI—I didn't have to convince them of anything. They had already decided this. But I felt that—well, obviously the arts are important, regardless of what the students are studying.

But I felt that particularly at MIT, where you have such a diverse body of students—I mean, one doesn't think so. If you haven't been here, you don't really understand that they're not just all these, you know, science techie people and—you know, with the straight and narrow limitations, and that they really have—are, of course, really smart. And also, so many of them have broad interests that extend well beyond what their particular major is, and that they're really phenomenal in a lot—in a lot of these other areas.

And so because of that, it was kind of easy to make that argument to whether it was the library administration or Council for the Arts or, you know, elsewhere in the university. And—and I think that the music department and the library were in sync about that. So they—the outside areas of them, outside this small group, were hearing this same message.

And it was being demonstrated by the performance that was going on. I mean, I remember in the '70s, even, the [MIT Symphony] Orchestra had made recordings on the Vox label. So I—you know, there was already evidence of the kind of music making and therefore music interests of the students here and how important that was to the students as well as to the Institute.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So there were composers on the music faculty, and I'm thinking particularly of Paul Earls and Barry Vercoe and Donald Sur. Did your conversations with them have an influence on your thinking about contemporary music and—

BLOTNER: Well, it broadened my, you know, spectrum of understanding and of the—not so much the significance, but the interplay among the different schools of contemporary music and, you know, what would be important here in this library. Because again, you can't buy everything. I mean, nobody can these days, especially. But even then, you still—you couldn't buy everything, whether it was a money issue or going to be a space issue and so forth. And so the more varied opinions I got, I thought the better it was because it wasn't one-sided. It was getting the broad spectrum.

LARSON: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

BLOTNER: And so I always learned, whether it was composers or historians, I always learned from the faculty. And I never felt that, oh, I shouldn't ask because they'll see that I don't know this or that or the other thing. I mean, you know, they were experts at what they did, and I was presumably becoming an expert at what I did. And we were all needed to build a good library. So I didn't see it as—as a confrontation or a challenge or anything like that.

LARSON: Mm-hm. So this is a nice lead-in to talking about The Boston Composers Project, that bibliography of Boston-area composers that you spearheaded. What was the impetus behind the—it's a significant project, to say the least.

BLOTNER: Well, it came out of the Boston Area Music Libraries and our very initial attempt that Mary Lou Little had started to do cooperative collection development. Because that's essentially another piece of that. We had, you know, gone through all the various parts of our collections.

And although there wasn't a particular LC classification or—for contemporary music, it still was an aspect that many of us were very interested in, either because of

what was going on in our institution, or because we were personally interested in contemporary music. I mean, New England Conservatory certainly had a lot of performances in contemporary music. MIT did. So I—you know, and so it was, we used to meet monthly, the Boston composers—the Boston Area Music Libraries.

And there were several other projects that we did. We went through—before we did that. We went through and made a list of all the M2 and M3 editions to see who was getting what. Was there a gap, maybe? We all—maybe somebody should cancel this and that title and be able to order this other title that nobody got. So we already were in the mode of doing cooperative collection development projects.

And so at some point, we got to contemporary music. And I don't know how the leap came from, that we should do for contemporary music what we'd already done for other parts of the collection to, oh, we could do this whole project and document it. We could be a pilot project, and other areas of the country could do that. It—it just came out of the discussions of the group, I think. One thing seemed to lead to another.

The only reason I got, as far as I can see—the only reason I got to be the project director was because in the process of writing a grant, well, MIT was really good at that and had all the connections in Washington and, you know, knew how to do these things. I was capable of it. Our Library Director, Jay Lucker, at the time was interested in the libraries bringing in more grants. And so the pieces kind of fit together.

We had the computers here, more advanced than at some of the other institutions. And Barry Vercoe said we could use the studio computers and would provide a programmer for somebody. He—he would allow them to use his studio, a composer, if the composer would spend time with us on the project getting the computer end of it going. So that was a nice cooperation also.

And there were just a lot of people here committed to the composers whom they knew already on their faculties. And that covered a broad spectrum. I mean, 15, 16 institutions, even the smallest had one or two composers or people who had been and retired or, you know, and so—and then the Boston Public Library could pick up all the people who weren't connected with a particular institution. So it just kind of fell into place, in a way.

LARSON: Wow. Because it's a significant work and a real labor of love that's—

BLOTNER: Yes, we all worked pretty hard on that.

LARSON: So is there any particular experience or composers that you worked with on that project are memorable?

BLOTNER: Well, we each pretty much worked with the composers on our faculties. So it wasn't really, for me, a new experience. Most of them were pretty cooperative. Some of them—not at MIT in particular—but some of them were too cooperative.

Norman Dello Joio was driving us crazy because he kept renumbering the movements or putting together some of his pieces differently. And there were new—and he—he changed them almost quicker than we could fix the database, and we did

have a cutoff. I mean, you know, he couldn't just keep doing this. So he was kind of driving us nuts a little bit.

Gunther Schuller was terrific. He never needed to be reminded. Every time there was a new piece, he sent a letter off to—probably it was Gerry Ostrove, I guess, who was at New England Conservatory then. He'd send a letter off, and we'd have his new music. We didn't have to go chasing down anything that might have changed.

Um—so, um, I didn't—I mean, since I dealt with the people here at MIT, I didn't really have a very difficult time with that. They were all pretty cooperative, and we'd already had an ongoing relationship for, you know, ten years or something. So—so, so for me that part of it was easy. Some of the other area schools that either didn't have a good relationship—well, I don't mean it was bad. But I mean, didn't have a regular close relationship, maybe, with their composers or had to pick up composers who used to be connected to the institution but now were elsewhere, and maybe they didn't know them, they might have had a harder time getting responses.

LARSON: Mm-hm. And you were also trying to find people who weren't affiliated with an institution. So you had other volunteers helping find that—those people and that information?

BLOTNER: Well, Mary Davidson was really good with that. She was the music librarian at Wellesley then. And she'd been here for a very long time because she had gone to school at Wellesley. Gone away to library school and then come back and worked at Brookline Public Library, and—and so she—she knew the area for a long time and was involved in contemporary music. And her then-husband, Lyle Davidson, was a composer. So she was kind of connected to a lot of—had been connected to a lot of that for a long time. So she was really helpful.

And there were some other people. I think Ruth Bleecker, who was the music—they head of the music division at Boston Public Library—I mean, people who had been around a long time here in Boston and so knew a lot of the composers were helpful in tracking some of them down. Natalie Breed, who had been the assistant at Boston Public, and I think she's now connected with the Harvard Musical Association. So, you know, through some of these people, we were able to track down some of the others. And then BPL [Boston Public Library] would handle those.

LARSON: So it was a nice convergence of—of expertise like that to make this happen.

BLOTNER: Yes, exactly. Mm-hm.

LARSON: Wow.

BLOTNER: Well, by that point, the Boston Area Music Libraries had done a lot of things together. And there hadn't been much turnover. So we were a pretty solid working group and just knew how to work together and accomplish things. And that made a big difference also. It was—and it's still going on, I think. And it's just a great group. It's very supportive.

5. Music Libraries and digital technology

LARSON: Yeah, yeah. So over the course of your career, you've seen the change from card catalogs and a very analog library environment to these vast changes in digital technology and user expectations. And you've published some works on that. There's lots of specific questions, but it would be interesting to get your, um, kind of take on what the digital revolution really has meant in terms of the user experience at libraries, and some of the pluses and maybe some of the downfalls of that.

BLOTNER: There's been a lot of discussion over the last week or two on the Music Library Association listserv about this topic. It started, I guess, with these statements last fall, the Taiga [Ed. Note: librarians forum for discussion about the future of libraries], so-called Taiga statements you might have seen on that listserv, about the libraries of the future. And music librarians got very angry about some of it and concerned because it just didn't take into account special needs that music libraries have.

And this discussion has picked up again recently on the listserv. And I think—I think when you talk about, you know, how users will be affected or have been affected, it depends on the users. Because if you think of the older generations, anyone, let's say, even maybe 50 years old or on or maybe even in their 40s, anybody who started out with card catalogs, every one of these changes has been—well, not quite traumatic, but a major change in how their world is functioning, as far as the library is concerned.

Many of the things have gotten easier. I mean, now, you don't have to call or go to the library. You can just search libraries all over the world from, you know, your home. But other things have gotten frustrating because the systems change. And I think that the younger people, who haven't known anything different, come in, and this is how libraries are.

So I think as far as the effect on users, it's going to change over the years as more and more of the younger people who are coming, growing into academia, are just not going to have known anything different. So it's going to be no change for them, no essential change, no really huge, monumental changes for them. It's just going to continue in this same path.

But as far as—well, there's so many. I mean, one of the big issues of discussion on the MLA listserv lately has been, are we going to be going totally—totally abandoning anything in print or, you know, any physical formats. And, no—I mean, obviously, nobody knows. But there's a turnaround. I mean, people are buying LPs again. You know, it's very hard to predict.

And furthermore, people have been concerned about everything that goes online and then the company decides to go out of business or close or whatever. And where'd your library go, you know? It's kind of disappeared. So I think—I think, obviously, things are going to change probably somewheres along in the future. And I mean longer term, not the next couple of years.

Yes, everything will be maybe like a *Star*—*Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* generations and *Star Wars*, too, I guess, where, you know, "Computer, pour me a glass of water," and "Computer, give me this." And it just all works perfectly all the time. But I think we have a really long way to go because the systems aren't there yet and because the people aren't there yet, either.

And I think, aside from those generalities, the specifics related to music make it a lot more difficult. When you think about performing and everybody needing their own part, and having it marked up to suit them for however they need to perform the piece, either for their own personal information or because this group is playing it this way, not that way, which their last group, you know, used for particular details.

So I think there are a lot more complications with music, with the printed music, with the fact that you've got to replace it from time to time. It gets such hard use, and the tears and the page turns and so forth. So I think that's going to be a whole different story than the audio part of it, which is already pretty much disappearing in physical formats, although so many people really still want the physical format.

And as far as the books, I don't know. You have all the people that like to, um, use the—the Kook [Nook e-book reader] and the—I forget the different companies all calling them something different—Kindle [e-book reader] and so forth. A lot of people want to do that.

And I still know a lot of people that really like holding a book in their hands. So maybe that will all go digital. But I think it's going to take a generation or so, so that you've got people who never—never knew holding a book as being the regular way that one read. So it's just evolving, and a lot of people who have retired are really happy that they don't have to deal with these decisions and changes on a, you know, daily or weekly basis because it's so hard to predict.

LARSON: Right. And of course, there's the preservation issue of digital formats.

BLOTNER: Yes, mm-hm.

LARSON: And I talk to so many people who are producing this stuff, and I say, well, have you made provisions for preservation? And they said, oh, I've never thought of that.

BLOTNER: Well, and that's like these companies that go out of business, and there goes your database. Well, you know, now what do you do? So, in fact, the Music Library Association was coping with this a year or two ago. There was an archiving task force, and—which I was on. And the decisions about some of the things were quite easy. I mean, the minutes for meetings and so forth, they're still—they're still going to do paper on that.

But what do you do about archiving the MLA website? And the website is expanding and putting additional kinds of information there that may not be elsewhere. How is this going to happen? And so we started to look at institutional repositories. But the one at the University of Maryland, which is where the MLA archives are, hadn't yet—and I think still hasn't, as of a couple of months ago—decided on exactly what they were going to do and where it was going to go.

And I talked to Peter [Munstedt, MIT Music Librarian] briefly at the time, aand to [Virginia] Ginny Danielson at Harvard [Loeb Music Library]. Daniels? Danielson? [Ed. note: Danielson is correct.] I always get that backwards. And so—you know, and University of Pennsylvania has an institutional repository. But, but—you know, there's a good example. This is just new, too new, in some ways, for—for MLA, at least, to decide what to do with its own archives, let alone every library to decide what direction to go in.

LARSON: Right. And of course, there's always going to be a need for somebody to help users navigate the world of information, whether it be a card catalog or the digital realm. And the librarian as educator is still really important.

BLOTNER: Oh, well, I think—I know some people maybe don't agree with this or like to predict otherwise. But—but I think there's always going to be a need for the librarians because things keep changing, first of all. And somebody needs to make the decisions about how to change things and how to compensate for things that go away that might still be needed, access points or materials or archival copies, all kinds of things. Coupled with, whatever new system evolves, you still need somebody to be adding to it, to be running it, to be able to find things in the system, to be teaching people, as you mentioned, how to do what they need to do, not necessarily the occasional or extraordinary chores.

And so you need—I mean, the name may change because there won't, maybe, be books. But you're still going to need a person that serves in that capacity, that interfaces between the individual and the information and teaches them how to get to it—or gets it for them, depending on the circumstances. So I don't see that going away. And if it's a totally different kind of person, you may get different types of people applying for those jobs than the personality characteristics of current librarians. But—but there's still—you know, you're still going to need somebody who organizes all of this and has the cooperation among institutions and databases and so forth that we're going to need.

LARSON: Right. And the concept of library as space—I mean, there's obviously a nostalgic aspect of that. But how do you see in the coming years as far as the need for library as a physical space?

BLOTNER: Well, you know, the statistics all show that libraries, you know, from gate counts and so forth, are still popular places. And the way I like to think about it is a quote that I have in that article by Michael Gorman, who said, well, you know, people can pray by themselves, and they can pray at home. But churches and synagogues and temples are all still pretty popular. And I think it's the same kind of thing.

People can do research at home. But what you're finding in libraries now, a lot, are areas, rooms or just sections of the library, that has furniture to accommodate small group study. And—and so I just don't see libraries disappearing because you can just log in and do something from home. It's the community sense that's important, plus the teaching sense.

6. Musical activities in retirement

LARSON: Right, right. So when you were here as Music Librarian, Marcus Thompson joined the faculty. And it looks like you've developed a long-term, you know, collegial relationship with him. And you're now on the Board of Directors of the Boston Chamber Music Society, which he's the artistic director of. Tell me about your collegial relationship with him over the years.

BLOTNER: Well, we both arrived here within a year or so of each other. And similar in age, similar in background, in the sense that we're both from New York, Brooklyn and so forth, although his musical talents were far different from mine. And—and so we became friendly and both wanted to make changes here, he to the chamber music program, me to the library. So we had a good overlap, you know, with—with wanting to do new things and different things.

And so that's kind of continued over the years. Sometimes out of touch, sometimes more in touch as now recently, again, with the Boston Chamber Music Society. And you know, I'd kind of asked him about being on the board and saying, well, you certainly don't need my musical expertise. You've got all these musicians there that are certainly going to know more about that than I am.

So what could I do for the board? And he said, well, it's kind of the way you think and approach things that would be—you know, it's interesting to hear questions you ask and a perspective that you take. And—and so far, in the maybe six months that I've been, um—barely six months, actually—that I've been on the board, that's come up in a couple of ways.

I notice—well, because most of the other people on the board have talents in other areas. I'm the one that notices what goes on sometimes in the music world. I—I see that Chamber Music America has grants that they offer and that BCMS might be able to apply for some of them. I see from my music library listserv that the—somebody from the NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] is coming to our—well, it was the national meeting we just had in March. And he's looking to talk to people about grants they might want. And the BCMS has an archive of their recordings that they need some money to help finish off. And so here's a match. So I'm seeing different things than what other people there are seeing.

Which, not to criticize them. They're seeing lots of things I don't see, and they're doing their part. But there seems to be a niche for me in—in the approach in what I'm seeing. They decided that—one of the members noticed that there was an article in Chamber Music America by some other performing group. And that they'd written up a project.

Um, and, um, and so I'm able to take some of the documentation that's already been prepared for the world festival and forum ser—forum and festival series—and rework that and come up with an article about this that will get them, you know, more PR and so forth. So you know, I'm still continuing in a parallel track to not only find work that will be helpful for the Boston Chamber Music Society, but kind of

supporting some of the directions or ideas that Marcus is going in with what I know from where I am and have been in the world and in my career.

LARSON: So tell me about some of your other, current activities. Your retirement looks like it's keeping you quite busy.

BLOTNER: Yes, it is. Generally, these things rotate. So I'm not too busy at one time. But this spring seems to be very busy. I'm still connected with MLA, in that I chair their Publications Committee. And it's kind of an oversight committee consisting of editors of the eight publications, plus a couple of ex officio people, publicity officer, advertising manager, treasurer, executive secretary, and so forth. But a lot of issues have come up lately.

And so we, for example, are thinking about, uh, creating some space for the committee on the new MLA website so that the committee can post publication proposals that they get and help determine which publication suits it best. Sometimes, something is sent to one editor who might reject it as not appropriate. But it actually might fit another publication or perhaps even an article in *Notes*. And so, you know, we're trying to have more sharing of information and working on that project.

We also have a lot of contracts, contracts with publishers, like EBSCO for the online version of things publishes with authors for copyright issues of, you know, who retains copyright. And so we now have all the contracts on a secure website that the editors can get to, and everybody knows the stage of whether it's been approved, whether there's a contract signed, and so forth. So there seem to be a lot of issues coming up that we could move forward with and get more cooperation and maybe simplify things for people.

So in fact we're probably at some point going to reconsider the focus and title of one of the series that we publish and maybe move it along to broaden its perspective and bring in additional publications that would be useful. So, so there's a lot going on with that, especially before and after the meeting, when everybody kind of focuses on this stuff.

I'm not sure where the Hartt Board of Trustees will go, since this is very new, just last month. But I'll probably be involved with the Alumni Committee for that group. They—they exist to support Hartt. They have nothing to do with the academic side of anything. That's the university's Board of Regents. So they make that clear up front. But it's supportive, fundraising, alumni outreach, and other things like that.

I'm working also now with the library from the temple that I belong to. It kind of fell into a sad state when the volunteer who—a retired librarian—passed away a few years ago, and then there was some renovation done in the temple in general. And nobody was quite sure what to make of the library. And so we've got a committee chaired by one of the vice presidents.

And I went and contacted a lot of libraries in other synagogues in my area. And of course, there's a national organization, as there is for almost everything these days. So I've had some contact with them. And we've done a survey. And we're about to meet tomorrow, I think, to see what we should do next. We thought we should probably do focus groups for the membership.

And this vice president happens to have just gotten a doctorate in social organization focused on synagogues in general—synagogue administration. So she probably will be very good at doing that part of it. And so we'll see where that goes.

And—and so that's what keeps me busy. I—I get—well, the other thing is, I was on three editorial search committees since last summer because every time there's a new editor in MLA, I'm kind of ex officio on it to have input from Publications Committee and a general oversight of how it fits into the whole publication structure. So that takes up my time. And I think there are going to be two more coming.

So there was a—oh, there's a Web Advisory Committee because the website's part under the rubric of publications. So, you know, publications sounds simple. But then you've got all these little pieces of it that stack up.

LARSON: Wow. So in the course of our conversation, part of what I was asking about is some of your own—your musicianship. Tell me about some of the music and composers and stuff that just really interests you personally.

BLOTNER: Oh. Well—you know, I tend to stick to the classics because I grew up with them. But whenever I go to—well, last night, I was at the Boston Chamber Music Society concert. And I'd never heard the [Ernest] Chausson sextet before. And that was just wonderful.

Marcus said it was never performed frequently because it's so difficult, and so people don't want to perform it. But it was just really wonderful. So, you know, I—I like to get to concerts where I can hear music, whether it's literally new music or just music that's new to me.

But, um—and, you know, and I manage to do that between Hartt—I hope being on the board will—and not working there, but being on the board will bring me back there more often. Initially, after I retired, I tried to keep my distance a little bit and leave space for a new person and, you know, not to be readily available to people. But that's been a few years now. So this looks like a good opportunity to be back in touch with things that they do there too.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Wow. Well, this has been just really tremendous. There's so much that you've left here that I think is going to be of interest to lots of people.

BLOTNER: Well, I hope so. It's—you know, some things, I'm sorry, were a little hard to remember because of all the years and things that have happened. But I guess the general direction gives—gives some evidence of what it's been like for me.

LARSON: Yeah. All right. Thank you very much.

BLOTNER: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]